10¢

TEN DETECTIVE ACES

10 STORIES 10¢

APRIL

An ACE Magazine

MY KINGDOM FOR A CORPSE

By W. T. Ballard

FOR VICTORY
BUY WAR BONDS
AND STAMPS

NOW! THE WHOLE AMAZING STORY OF YOUR WONDERFUL HUMAN BODY!

LET DR. FISHBEIN HELP YOU TO UNDERSTAND YOUR BODY — ITS FUNCTIONS — HELP YOU TO BETTER HEALTH AND VITALITY

None of the wonders of nature are comparable to your own body! Now the entire amazing story is YOURS in one of the most unusual books ever published! Over 750,000 copies of this great home medical guide have already been sold. Now it has been brought up to date with many new illustrations and up-to-the-minute discoveries!

Imagine having at your very elbow, day and night, 24 eminent physicians, each an outstanding specialist in his field, to advise you on questions about your most precious possession — your health and your children's health! The famous MODERN HOME MEDICAL ADVISER does just that! In its 905 pages you will find priceless advice and experience of the medical profession—advice which shows you how to help avoid pain and worry—how to help maintain perfect health—how to help you live to a good old age—how and when to call your doctor. MAIL FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!

Let These 24 Famous Physicians Tell You What Each Condition Is . . . How It Exists . . . How To Help Overcome IT!

Hugh R. Butt, M.D.
Mayo Foundation
William W. Duke, M.D.
Kansas City, Mo.
Newell C. Gilbert, M.D.
Northwestern Univ.
Jacob P. Greenhill, M.D.
Gynecology, Loyola Univ.
Philip S. Hench, M.D.
Mayo Clinic
Raphael Isaacs, M.D.
Internal Med., Univ. of Mich.
Philip C. Jeans, M.D.
Pediatrics, Iowa College
Elliott P. Joslin, M.D.
Harvard
Philip Lewin, M.D.
Northwestern Univ.
Carey P. McCord, M.D.
Univ. Cincinnati
R. Tait McKenzie, M.D.
University of Pa.
Howard M. Odel, M.D.
Mayo Clinic
Milton M. Portis, M.D.
Loyola
Wingate M Johnson, M.D.
Winston-Salem, N. C.
Sidney A. Portis, M.D.
Loyola
George K. Pratt, M.D.
Ben Z. Rappaport, M.D.
Univ. of Illinois
Thurman B. Rice, M.D.
Indiana Univ.
Elmer L. Sevringhaus, M.D.
University of Wisconsin
Arthur W. Stillians, M.D.
Northwestern Univ.
Solomon Strouse, M.D.
Rush Medical College
Frederick F. Tisdall, M.D.
Univ. of Toronto
Russell M. Wilder, M.D.
Mayo Clinic
Francis Carter Wood, M.D.
Ed. Amer. Jour. of Cancer

Edited by
Morris Fishbein, M.D.

WHICH OF THESE COMMON AILMENTS IS KEEPING YOU *HALF SICK?*

SKIN DISEASES
Dr. A. W. Stillians, Professor of Dermatology, Northwestern Univ. advises you.

RHEUMATISM ARTHRITIS GOUT
Don't miss Dr. Fishbein's own chapter on these diseases

DEFICIENCY DISEASES
Let Dr. Russell M. Wilder, Mayo Clinic, tell you about Vitamins and Minerals.

THE ONE BOOK YOU CANNOT AFFORD TO BE WITHOUT

When a scream of pain terrifies your home, this great book of home medical advice may actually help save a life! For the protection of yourself and loved ones, you need to know certain medical facts NOW more than ever before. And here's your opportunity of a lifetime to get the most authoritative—the most comprehensive modern home medical adviser ever published. This one giant book contains all the facts you should understand NOW about Vitamins—Sex Anatomy and Physiology—Childbirth—Diseases—Colds—Constipation—Allergy—Diet—First Aid—a gold mine of medical knowledge that you will use time and again, that everyone ought to know.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED at $7.50 . . . You Now SAVE 60%!

FREE! 7-DAY TRIAL

Send No Money

To obtain your copy of the MODERN HOME MEDICAL ADVISER for Free Examination simply mail coupon.

If, after examining this book, you don't agree it's indispensable to your health send it back after 7 days and pay nothing. If you decide to keep it, send only $1—$1.95 a month later (plus 20 cents for postage and handling) as payment in full. Mail Coupon today to BOOK PRESENTATIONS, 17 West 60th Street, New York 23, N. Y.

FREE EXAMINATION COUPON

BOOK PRESENTATIONS Dept. 44 M
17 West 60th St., New York 23, N. Y.

Send me the Modern Home Medical Adviser, for 7-Days Free Examination. At the end of 7 Days I will either send you $1, then $1.95 a month later (plus 20 cents postage and packing charges) as payment in full; or else return the book to you and pay nothing.

☐ CHECK HERE for beautiful De Luxe Edition in simulated leather, titles stamped in gilt. Only 50 cents extra.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... P.O. Zone No. (if any) .... STATE .....

☐ CHECK HERE if you prefer to save 20 cents postage and packing charges by enclosing your check or money-order for full amount. Same return privilege & full refund guarantee.

HOSPITAL and DOCTOR BILLS PAID!

HOSPITALIZATION PLAN

3¢ costs about A DAY

COVERS SICKNESS or ACCIDENT

Do you know that an average of one person out of every ten becomes a hospital patient each year? More than 35,000 patients enter hospitals daily. You, or one of your family might be next! Don't go into debt or bankrupt your savings when Sickness or Accident strikes. Be prepared—protect yourself NOW!

PAYS BENEFITS FROM FIRST DAY

This dependable Hospitalization Plan PAYS YOUR BILLS FROM THE VERY FIRST DAY exactly as provided. Do not confuse this policy with the others that skip paying benefits for the first 7 or 14 days of disability.

ISSUED TO INDIVIDUALS or FAMILIES

You or members of your family may be protected against Hospitalization resulting from Sickness or Accident. Everyone, in good health, from 6 months to 70 years of age can now apply for this policy.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN HOSPITAL and DOCTOR

Any recognized Hospital and any Doctor in the United States or Canada may be selected by you. You are not required to enter any particular Hospital under this liberal Hospitalization plan.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION — NO RED TAPE — NO AGENTS

No medical examinstion is required. If you are in good health we take your word for it. We have eliminated red tape as well as agents. Mail plan gives maximum insurance at low cost.

FREE INFORMATION—NO OBLIGATION

Send no money—just mail the coupon. We will send you complete details and 10 day FREE Inspection offer. DON'T DELAY!

GEORGE ROGERS CLARK CASUALTY COMPANY
Dept. 3390 • Rockford, Illinois

GET FREE FACTS

POLICY PAYS
Hospital and Doctor Bills up to

$6.00 EACH DAY **HOSPITAL** $540
Room and Board for Adults up to 90 days

$25 EACH WEEK **LOSS of TIME** $300
From work up to 12 weeks

$135.00 **DOCTOR** $135.00
Expenses

LOSS of LIFE, LIMBS or SIGHT
$1,000.00

Many other liberal benefits. All as plainly stated in Policy.

MAIL COUPON NOW

George Rogers Clark Casualty Company, Dept. 3390
Rockford, Illinois

Please rush FREE information about Hospital and Doctor's Expense Policy.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY & STATE_____

Fill in coupon. Clip and paste to Postal Card or mail in envelope.

10¢ TEN DETECTIVE ACES 10 STORIES 10¢

An ACE Magazine

April, 1944 Vol. XLIX, No. 3

★ 10 New, Different Stories—No Serials ★

1. MY KINGDOM FOR A CORPSE (Novelet) W. T. Ballard 4
Hollywood lawyer Lou Page is slated to star in a filmtown fadeout.

2. HOT MONEY FREEZE-OUT . . . . George N. Laws 22
Penny-ante crime tricks and million dollar hauls don't mix.

3. RED RUNS THE DEVIL'S LAKE . . . . Tom Marvin 25
The ghost of the gunman king rises to carry the gang-busters back to hell.

4. JAIL, JAIL, THE GANG'S ALL HERE! ("Dizzy Duo" Yarn) . . . . . Joe Archibald 36
Snooty Piper, the wacky philatelist, tries to stamp out crime, but forgets that even the best stamps get cancelled.

5. PAGE MR. MURDER (Novelet) . . . . Talmage Powell 45
Who could be better fitted to guard a corpse's life than a dick named Murder?

6. FOLLOW THE BONY FINGER . . . . Lee Kessler 64
A true crime story of a cadaver that put the finger on its own slayer.

7. A SLIP IN CRIME . . . . . Greta Bardet 67
Detective Weber slips on a murder room rug and lands square on a killer.

8. TIMEKEEPER FOR THE GRIM REAPER Robert S. Fenton 74
The hour of the robbery was set by the thief, but the cops knew how to fix his clock.

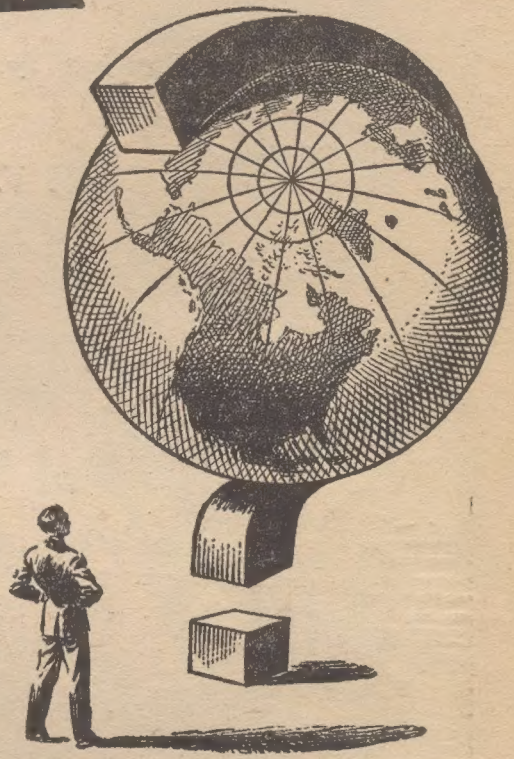
9. THE HICK AND THE HIJACKERS . . William Hellmann 79
Gunless Johnny delivers a load of armed convicts back to the pen.

10. SUICIDE SCENARIO . . . . . Charles Larson 81
That publicity man may have to study the previews from a morgue slab.

Cover by Ralph C. Smith

Published bi-monthly by Periodical House, Inc.; office of publication, 29 Worthington St., Springfield 3, Mass. A. A. Wyn, President. Editorial and executive offices, 67 W. 44th St., New York 18, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter Nov. 14, 1928, at Springfield, Mass., under Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1944, by Periodical House, Inc. T. M. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off. Manuscripts will be handled with care, but this magazine assumes no responsibility for their safety. For advertising rates address Ace Fiction Group, 67 W. 44th St., New York 18, N. Y. Yearly Subscription, 60 cents; Single Copies, Ten Cents.

What will be YOUR place in the new world



Victory will find us in a new world of electronics, synthetics, plastics, light metals, prefabricated buildings, high-octane gasoline —thousands of *new* industrial developments.

Look ahead to your place in the era of production marvels. Don't be satisfied to slide along in the same old groove while ambitious fellow-workers prepare to take over the top positions and the top rewards.

Far-sightedness is one of the requisites of leadership. Those possessing it are acting *today* to be qualified as *trained men* when tomorrow comes. They are mastering I. C. S. Courses NOW!

The cost of I. C. S. *training* is just a few dollars monthly. Mark your interest in the list of courses and mail the coupon for complete information on I. C. S. advantages *right now!* This can be the *turning point* of your career!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

HELPING TO TRAIN AMERICANS FOR VICTORY

SPECIAL TUITION RATES FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES ★

BOX 3342-E, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me booklet and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Air Brake
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Airplane Drafting
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Auto Engine Tune-up
- ☐ Auto Technician
- ☐ Aviation ☐ Aviation Mechanic
- ☐ Blueprint Reading
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Bridge Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Concrete Engineering
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electrician
- ☐ Electrical Maintenance
- ☐ Foundryman ☐ Heating
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ House Planning
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Machinist ☐ Inspector
- ☐ Management of Inventions
- ☐ Marine Engines
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mine Foreman
- ☐ Navigation ☐ Patternmaking
- ☐ Plastics ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Public Works Engineering
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ R. R. Section Foreman
- ☐ R. R. Signalman ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Sheet Metal Work
- ☐ Ship Drafting
- ☐ Shipfitting ☐ Shop Practice
- ☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engines
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Telegraphy ☐ Telephony
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking ☐ Tool Design
- ☐ Welding, Gas and Electric
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

BUSINESS COURSES

- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Cartooning ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Commercial Illustrating
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ C. P. Accounting
- ☐ Federal Tax Course
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship ☐ French
- ☐ Good English ☐ High School
- ☐ Managing Men at Work
- ☐ Railway Postal Clerk
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Secretarial ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Showcard and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Traffic Management

HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

- ☐ Advanced Dressmaking
- ☐ Foods and Cookery
- ☐ Home Dressmaking
- ☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing
- ☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

Name.....Age.....Home Address.....

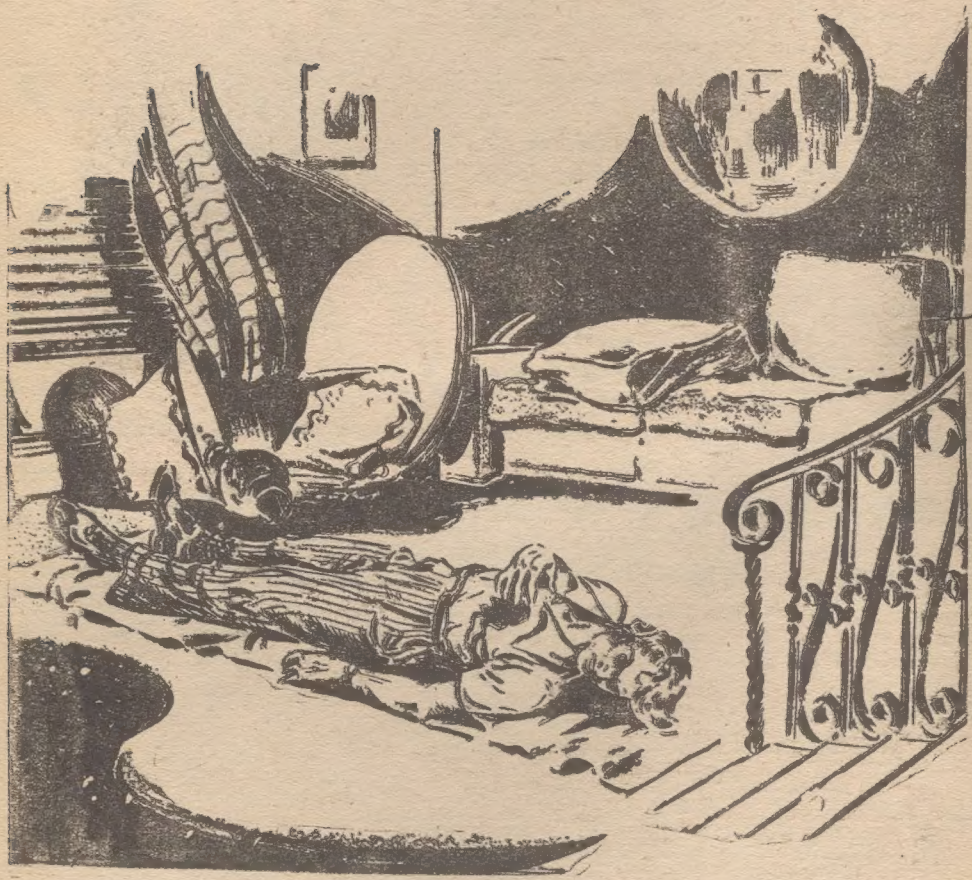
City.....State.....Present Position.....Working Hours.....

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England.

My Kingdom for a

Baffling Mystery Novelet

By W. T. Ballard



Against his will, movietown lawyer Lou Page became cash custodian of an old desert rat's poke. But Page found he was guarding the price of a suicide studio. And before he could line up that killers' cast, Page himself was slated to star in a filmtown fadeout.

Corpse

CHAPTER I

THE little old man came into my Hollywood Boulevard office about five fifty-five. I was just getting ready to close up shop and call it a day.

He didn't look important and I wasn't very impressed as he planted himself in the chair beside my desk. I wasn't impressed until he unbuttoned his coat and started taking out packages of money.

It was like one of those animated cartoons where a taxi drives up and four hundred people get out. The

money kept coming until it seemed impossible that so much dough could have been concealed under the oldster's coat. I stood up for a better look and realized that his slim body was sheathed in a kind of canvas vest that was nothing but a row of pockets.

He had to take off his coat to reach the ones at the back and I saw that he was lousy with money. It made quite a pile on my desk, but one thing I noted was that most of the bills were small time, ones and fives, with a few packages of tens, mixed with larger bills.

He never looked at me during the shucking process, just kept pulling out the taped bundles until he had thoroughly stripped himself. Then he calmly put on his coat and sat down.

"I want you to take care of that for me, Mr. Page."

"You've come to the wrong place," I told him as soon as I could get my breath. "What you want is a bank, not a lawyer's office."

He shook his head. "The banks are closed. Besides, I don't trust them. Had money in a bank once, near a quarter of a million, and they closed the place up. Never got a red cent, not one red cent."

I'd heard of banks like that. I opened my mouth to tell him that things were different now, what with the federal insurance and all, then I closed it slowly.

"Just for a matter of record, how much is there?" I indicated the mound of currency on my desk.

"A hundred and seventy thousand."

I BLINKED, looking at him. I couldn't very well dispute his words. I took a finger and stirred the pile. There were some packets of twenties that I'd missed when he first produced them, some hundreds, too, and three packets of thousand dollar bills, old style ones, looking big and unfamiliar after the smaller money that we've been using.

"And just why bring it here? You don't know me."

"Jack Cartwright said you were okay."

I started when he mentioned Cartwright, then I reached for the phone and dialed Cartwright's number. While I waited for my connection I asked:

"What did you say your name was?"

"Barns," he told me. "Captain Barns."

A blonde voice asked what I wanted. I told her it was Lou Page and I wanted to talk to Cartwright.

He answered almost at once and I said, "There's an old—" I almost said goat, but at the last moment I changed it to, "Gentleman in the office. His name is Captain Barns, and he says that you sent him."

I heard Cartwright chuckle. "So Cap showed up, did he? Well, take care of him and send me the bill. He's harmless."

"A hundred and seventy thousand bucks worth." I couldn't keep a slight trembling note out of my voice.

"What?" it sounded as if Cartwright was coming through the phone.

"Your friend just tossed a hundred and seventy thousand bucks on my desk."

"What's he going to use it for?"

I put a hand over the phone mouthpiece and said to Barns, "Cartwright wants to know what you're going to use all that money for?"

The old man didn't smile and he showed no resentment at the question. "I'm going to buy a motion picture studio."

I relayed the information to Cartwright in a voice that threatened to crack a little and heard him swear. "Look, Page, the old boy must be off his chump. That desert sun must have finally cooked his brains. Keep him in your office until I get there."

"Make it fast," I said.

"I'm flying," he told me, and clicked up the receiver.

I looked at my newest client. With the money removed, his clothes looked

a lot too big for him. His skin was thick, wrinkled, and reddish brown as if he had spent most of his life in the sun. His eyebrows were thick, bushy, and white. His hair needed cutting and was as white as his brows. His straggly mustache was white also, except at the corners where it had brownish tobacco stains.

"Cartwright's on his way over," I said. "He wants you to wait until he gets here."

The old man showed no surprise or concern. "Just count that money, young fellow, and make certain that I ain't pulling a fast one."

I was still counting it when Cartwright walked in, and he wasn't alone. Jerry Norton. Jerry Norton was his partner in the mining business, a round, well-fed little man with horn-rim glasses and the look of an insurance salesman about him.

THEY were both excited. I could tell by the way they acted. Usually Jack Cartwright had no more expression than a professional gambler, but now his dark eyes were snapping and his lips smiling.

"Cap. This is a surprise. What's all this nonsense about you buying a picture studio?"

Barns shifted his chew of tobacco from one leather cheek to the other. "Ain't no nonsense," he said. "Why shouldn't I buy a picture studio?"

Cartwright's eyes were on the mound of currency. "No reason, I guess, except the price. Have you any idea what a studio is worth?"

Barns shrugged and indicated the heap of money with a wave of his old hand. "I got money."

Cartwright looked at me and I saw that he was having trouble keeping his face straight. "Yes, Cap, but some of the studios are worth a hundred million. Why, they spend more money than you have on a B picture."

The old man was not impressed. "You let me worry about that," he said. "This joint can be bought for what I got to pay. The man said so."

"The man," Cartwright's voice had quickened. "What man?"

"Bernhardt Sloane."

Cartwright gasped, looking at me. We both knew Sloane. He had been in about every racket that had ever existed in Hollywood from running a gambling boat off the coast to a blackmail sheet that the stars paid to keep their names out of print.

Cartwright spread his hands in a little gesture that said louder than any words, "What can we do? We've got to stop this somehow."

I shook my head. This was getting beyond my depth. I thought I'd seen everything in the eight years that I'd been practicing law in Hollywood, but this whole business had me stopped cold.

"But why do you want a studio?" Cartwright demanded.

"My grand-niece," said the old man. "She wants to be an actress. She played the lead in the high school play in Vegas last year and she was durn good. But all these fancy-pants guys out here won't give her no break."

"So, you're buying a studio to let her become an actress?" A gleam of sanity had come into Cartwright's dark eyes.

"That's right."

"But, Cap," Cartwright was almost pleading. "This Sloane is nothing but a crook. He doesn't even own a studio."

"The devil he don't," said the old man. "I seen it. It's down beyond the end of Melrose Street. You go up a hill and over into a little wash and there she is."

BOTH Cartwright and I groaned. We knew the studio he was talking about, a relic of the silent picture days, nothing but a bunch of wooden stages with an old fence around it. The land was worth maybe ten, maybe fifteen thousand if you could find a buyer; the buildings weren't even good firewood.

"Look," said Cartwright. "I'm an old friend of yours. You trust me,

don't you? This Sloane is a crook. No one could make a picture in that junk heap if they wanted to. If they made it, what would they do with the film? There's a lot more to the picture business than just getting a camera and taking pictures. You've got to have a release, you got to have actors, labs, men who know how to run them—where'd you meet Sloane anyhow?"

"Vegas," said the old man. "He was over there, doing a little gambling."

"Look," said Jerry Norton, opening his mouth for almost the first time since walking into the office. "If he wants to make a picture for his grandniece, why not introduce him to Jim Crew?"

"Shut up," said Cartwright. And then as Norton's face expressed amazement: "Sorry, it's just that I don't think Cap should spend his money."

"I'm going to," said the old man doggedly.

Cartwright hesitated. From his manner I knew that he was trying to decide something. Finally he said, "If you must make a picture, you must, but I don't advise it and I certainly won't hear of you doing business with that crook, Sloane. I'll tell you what. You go back to your hotel. I'll try and get hold of Jim Crew and talk to him. Give me the name of your hotel and I'll contact you in the morning."

Captain Barns wagged his grey head. "Don't know," he said uncertainly. "Sure don't. Made a halfway dicker with this Sloane. He ain't going to like it if I back out."

"I'll take care of Sloane," Cartwright promised. "I'll have Lou put your money in his wall safe. It will be there when you want it."

I started to protest but he silenced me with a wave of his hand. I don't know how he managed it, but he got rid of the old man in record time, then he came back into the office mopping his forehead.

"Come on, let's take this stuff out to your house and dump it in your safe."

I protested, but he wouldn't listen. "The crazy old fool," he said.

"Where'd you meet him?" I asked.

"He had a little sheep ranch over in Nevada," Cartwright explained. "Used to hunt over there. He discovered a silver ledge eight or nine years back. I tried to make him let me handle it, but he wouldn't listen. He lost it."

"And this money?"

"Must have found some more mineral." Cartwright wasn't interested. "This is a jam. Sloane is liable to be hard to handle."

CHAPTER II

THE girl was cute and she had red hair. Also, she was mad. I found her standing in the little porch of my Westwood house as I drove into the circular driveway. I wondered what she was selling.

It was the next evening and I'd been busy all day, so busy that I hadn't given much thought to the old rancher and the hundred and seventy thousand in the wall safe of my library.

I left the car in the drive and crossed toward the little porch. "Something I can do for you?"

"If your name is Page?" She certainly did not sound friendly.

"It's Page all right," I admitted, opening the door and leading her across the square hall and into my library. "What can I do for you, Miss . . ."

"Barns," she said, watching me.

It took me a full second to connect the name with the old rancher. There wasn't much similarity of appearance between him and this girl.

"Oh, you're—?"

"I'm Captain Barns' grand-niece. I believe that you have some money of his in your possession. I want it."

I stared at her, then I smiled. "Really, Miss Barns. You hardly expect me to hand over a lot of money to a stranger."

"I've got my driver's license," she said with a perfectly straight face. "That should identify me."

I smiled a little. "Probably, but I can hardly turn the money over to you without a signed order from your great-uncle."

"Then I'll go to the District Attorney's office," she warned. "I'm not going to let a slick bunch of crooks get away with the Captain's money like they did last time."

I stared at her. She was very angry. There's a funny thing about anger. It breeds anger. I'd never seen her before in my life and yet I was getting mad at her.

"Meaning that I'm a crook?"

"You've got the Captain's money, haven't you?"

"Look," I said, "and let's get this straight. The District Attorney doesn't always approve of my methods, but he's yet to call me a crook. I think you'll find that the the bar association will give me a clean bill of health."

"Then what are you doing with the Captain's money?"

"He brought it to my office," I explained. "I didn't ask him to. In fact I'd never heard of him in my life until he arrived."

"That's a lie," she flashed at me.

"Look," I was having all I could do to keep my voice level. "Mind telling me one thing? Just how long is it since anyone gave you a spanking."

"Years," she flashed.

"That's what I thought. Someone's been neglecting you, sister." Before she realized what I meant to do, I grabbed her arm, turned her over my knee. I only managed to strike once before she twisted herself free and jumped away, her grey-green eyes blazing.

"If I had a gun, I'd kill you."

I STARED at her. "Someone should have taught you manners. It isn't the best policy to go around yelling crook at a man you've never met before."

Her voice was bitter. "I can only judge you by the company you keep."

"Meaning Cartwright?" I suggested. "His reputation is pretty good around town."

"They don't pay off on reputation," her voice was still bitter. "He did my great-uncle out of one mine and I'm not going to let him get away with all this money."

"I don't know anything about this mine you're talking about," I told her, "but I do know that Captain Barns was heading for trouble. You know why he's over here, don't you?"

She hesitated. "I'm—not certain."

"He came over here to buy a studio to star you in pictures."

"Buy a studio—you're crazy."

"It's the old boy that's crazy," I said. "He made a dicker, as he called it, with Bernhardt Sloane. I don't suppose you've been around town long enough to know who Sloane is."

She said, "He runs the Victory Club, doesn't he?"

"Among other things," I told her. "He's a ba-ad boy, and I'm not fooling. Whatever you think, Cartwright is trying to give Captain Barns a break and—" I broke off for the doorbell chimes had sounded.

There wasn't anyone in the house to answer but me. There aren't any servants left in Hollywood; they've all gone to work at the war plants and most of them were making more money than I was, the law business being pretty well shot.

"Wait here," I told her and moved out into the hall. I hadn't realized how long we'd been talking. It hadn't seemed long, but the hall was darkening so I guessed it must be after seven. I punched the light switch as I passed, then pulled open the door.

There were two men on the little porch outside. What scant light remained was at their back and their heads were drawn low so that the radiance from the hall light didn't strike the upper part of their faces. I didn't recognize the lead man until he spoke, then I realized that it was Bernhardt Sloane and got a sudden funny twisting feeling at the pit of my stomach.

"Hello," I said and tried to make my voice sound pleasant.

Sloane just grunted. The man with him made no noise at all. He was a small man where Sloane was tall and big-boned. In the light tropical suit he wore he looked almost womanish. I'd recognized him almost as soon as I recognized Sloane. They called him Joe Grit around town. If he had another name, I'd never heard it.

There were funny stories about Grit. Some said that he was Sloane's bodyguard, some that he was the real brains behind Sloane's enterprises. I didn't know about that and I wasn't anxious to find out.

"You wanted to see me?"

FOR answer Sloane started walking forward through the door. I could have stood there and blocked his passage or I could step back. I chose to step back. I didn't want to start anything unless I had to.

But I couldn't keep all of the anger out of my voice. "What's the idea of crowding in here?"

"Button it," said Sloane. "You've mussed into something which isn't your business."

"Meaning . . ." I knew what he meant all right. I was stalling, trying to think of a way out. I couldn't think of any offhand. Under my breath I cursed Jack Cartwright for ever giving the old boy my name, even dragging me into this mess.

"Don't stall," he said. "You've got a hundred and seventy grand parked around here somewhere that belongs to me."

"To you?" I managed to raise my eyebrows.

"To me." His voice was level. "I made a deal with the old dodo and I'm not going to let any smart shyster chisel in on my play. You've got the money and I want it, now."

He pulled both hands out of his coat pockets, and there was a gun in the right one, blue and flat and shiny.

"Wait," I said. "You're making a mistake. Jack Cartwright and—"

"And Jim Crew and Jerry Norton," his voice mocked me. "They're in on this little deal. I understand all that. I won't stand for chiseling, even from big shots like them. Get the money, now." He poked the gun against my stomach, hard, forcing me backward along the hall toward the library door. "It will be in your wall safe."

I stared at him. "You seem to know all about it."

"I do," his voice expressed his satisfaction. His eyes were an odd color, looking almost amber as they came under the hall lights. "I make it my business to keep track of things that belong to me."

Joe Grit laughed. It was high and soft, but there was something in the sound which made the short hairs at the back of my neck rise. I didn't like either of these guys. They were both killers, I didn't need anyone to tell me that. I wasn't going to get a slug in the belly just to protect the hundred and seventy grand. Captain Barns might get himself some more money somewhere, but it was a cinch that I wasn't going to find a new stomach in a hurry.

Only one thing worried me. The girl in the library. I didn't want her hurt and I wasn't certain what she would try to do when she saw her great-uncle's money vanishing into Sloane's pocket.

But I didn't need to waste time worrying about that redhead. She was perfectly able to take care of herself. She wasn't anywhere in sight when I walked into the book-lined room. I didn't try to stall. With men like these, there wasn't any use. I walked around my desk to where a row of fake books masked the wall safe and pressed the spring which let them slide out of the way.

Both Sloane and Grit were at my heels as I pressed the spring and it was as if my touching the button released the girl. She stepped out from behind the curtains which masked the deep-seated window on the men's right and said in a level voice:

"Both of you raise your hands. Quick!"

They obeyed. I think the fact that it was a woman who gave the order had as much to do with their prompt compliance as anything else.

"Get their guns, Mr. Page."

I'D SWUNG around to face them. I had a glimpse of the girl from the corner of my eye, but I spent no time looking at her. I reached out and twisted the flat gun from Sloane's raised hand, used it to nudge him out of the way and faced Grit.

He swore at me in his womanish voice and I cuffed him across the mouth with the back of my free hand. He spat at me through bruised lips. His eyes were so pale that they looked almost white between the long black curling lashes, but he was careful not to move his small hand toward the pocket which held his gun. I got it, dropped it into my own pocket, spun him around, and used a kick to head him toward the door.

He staggered, almost falling, and I looked at Sloane who still held his hands high, his yellowish eyes glowing a little as he watched me.

"Get going," I told him, "or I'll use my shoe on you too."

He lowered his hands and used them to straighten his tie. "I wouldn't, Page. I don't forget easily."

"Remember this," I said. "The next time you burst into my place with a gun, I'll kick a couple of ribs in."

I was sore. I hated to let them go, but there wasn't much else I could do. If I called the police and swore out a complaint, I'd have to explain what they'd been doing there, all about the money in the safe, and about the old man who wanted to buy a picture studio.

The papers would have had a field day with such a story, but as things worked out, I wish that I'd yelled copper right then.

Instead I went down the hall, following my friends, making certain that they left. They didn't waste much time at that, almost running down the walk to where they had left their car. I heard the motor start, saw them pull away.

I snapped the night latch on the door, just to make sure that they wouldn't try to sneak back and surprise me, then I returned to the library and the girl. She was standing beside the desk as cool as if nothing had happened.

"It's lucky you had a gun," I told her. "We'd have been in a fine jackpot if you hadn't."

"But I didn't."

"You didn't?" I stared at her. "Then how . . ."

"They were both yellow," there was an edge of contempt in her voice. "I knew they didn't have enough nerve to turn around and find out whether I really had a gun or not."

I chuckled. The idea of Sloane and Joe Grit being held up by an empty-handed girl was funny. Then I sobered and told her in a level voice:

"You got away with it that time, sister, but don't make any mistake. Those two are not yellow, not in the way you mean. They play percentages and it wasn't worth taking a chance, trying to rush you. That's all." I laid the guns I'd taken from them on the desk.

"Where do we go from here? Still think I'm a crook?"

She reached out and picked up Sloane's gun. "I'll take that money now, Mr. Page."

I stared at her, at the gun. "You little fool, put that down."

"No," she said and her eyes glinted a little. "Don't make me shoot you, Mr. Page. I assure you that I can and will. I've handled guns ever since I was ten years old."

She wasn't kidding either. My first impulse had been to grab the gun from her hand, but something in her eyes, in the manner that she held it stopped me.

I swore, but I also turned and began twirling the safe's dial. "I suppose you won't mind giving me a re-

ceipt for this, or are you planning a holdup game in which the Captain sues me to recover the money?"

"I'll give you a receipt," she promised.

I didn't say anything. The packages of money pretty well filled the safe which wasn't built for a bank vault. I hauled them out, stacking them on the desk. I noted as I did so that she'd added Joe Grit's gun to her collection. Certainly this girl was not taking chances.

"You'll need a bag or something to carry this in," I said. "It looks to me as if the Captain had collected it from newsboys and scrub women."

She smiled too sweetly. "I'll just take your case."

The case which she referred to was a fifty dollar calfskin briefcase that I was very proud of.

I made a slight motion at her words and the gun in her hand shifted in a little threatening gesture. "Don't try it, Mr. Page."

I didn't. I stood by, watching her load the case. It barely held the loot and it was going to be heavy. "My receipt." I suggested and sat down on the corner of the desk, lighting a cigarette.

I think that's what made her careless, my apparent acceptance of the situation. She didn't lay the gun down as she wrote the receipt, but she did transfer it to her left hand.

WHEN she'd finished I squeezed out the coal of my cigarette in the ashtray and leaned forward to pick up the receipt. At the last moment my hand shifted and I used the edge of it to strike her wrist hard.

The blow knocked the gun from her grasp and it clattered against the desk top. I used my other hand to grab her shoulder and spin her out of the desk chair. She fell to the thick carpet, but she didn't quit, she was struggling to drag Joe Grit's gun from her pocket.

I wasted no time. I dragged myself across the slick top of the desk and dived for her, grabbing her wrist just as she freed the gun.

She tried to sink her white teeth into my hand and I cuffed her, hard.

"Stop it or I'll knock you cold." I had Joe Grit's gun and swung it as if I really meant to clip her.

She stopped struggling then and just lay there, her grey-green eyes hating me. I came up to my feet and watched her rise slowly, then I picked up the receipt.

"I could keep this and the money too," I said. "If I was as big a crook as you seem to think."

I tore it across while she watched, then I picked up Sloane's gun from where it had fallen on the desk and dropped it into my pocket. "Just so you won't have any more silly ideas."

After that I put the money back into the safe, then I sat down in a chair and offered her a cigarette. She took it wordlessly, but the glittering look of hate did not leave her eyes.

"You win this round, Mr. Page." The words and the way she said them made a threat.

"What do I win?" I asked.

"My great-uncle's money. Isn't that what you're after?"

I spread my hands. "I'm not after anything," I told her. "I'd like nothing better than to turn this money back to Captain Barns and forget that I'd ever heard of either of you. You can't seem to get it through your thick head that people are actually trying to do you a favor."

Her lips twisted a little. "A fine favor, I can imagine."

I was sore at her. "Okay, you can imagine, but Jack Cartwright is trying to help you. He's going to get Jim Crew to make a picture, using part of your uncle's money. You won't play the lead, but if your test comes out okay, you'll get a good part."

"I don't believe you. I've been in Hollywood six months and the closest I've been to a studio is when I rode the beach car past the Fox Lot."

I was pretty close to throwing her out, but also, I didn't want any pub-

licity. I reached over, used the phone and got Jim Crew on the wire.

"This is Lou Page," I told him when I heard his heavy, rumbling voice. "Did Cartwright speak to you about the Barns girl? He did, yes. Well, she's here now and she hardly believes it."

I heard his chuckle, then he sobered. "Bring her over here and let me have a look at her. I can't tell of course until we make a test, but I'd like to meet her."

I replaced the receiver and told her we were going over to Crew's.

I could tell by her expression that she still wasn't certain about me, but a doubt was beginning to creep in. She wasn't so sure as she had been that I was a crook.

CHAPTER III

BY HOLLYWOOD standards, Crew's place was not large. It was a one story frame, white, and built like a box. It didn't set far back from the curving street and the lot was not large. Nor was there a swimming pool.

Jim Crew wasn't even a big shot, but he was a competent independent producer who made three or four pictures each year and had no trouble peddling them.

I turned into the curving driveway which made a half-moon loop around the front yard and parked before the small entrance porch.

The girl followed me from the car. She was subdued now as if she realized the mistake that she'd made and did not know quite how to apologize.

I gave her no chance. I wasn't over being sore. After all, I had a certain standing in town and to have a red-headed fury accuse me of half the crimes in the calendar didn't set exactly right.

I stopped and reached for the bell, then I realized that the door was open a crack. I stared at it in surprise. Not many doors in the movie village stand open that way. There's too much trouble with curious tourists and autograph seekers.

I decided that Jim Crew's houseboy must be very careless, and pressed the bell. Inside I heard the sound of chimes, but nothing else happened. I punched it again and then again. Still nothing happened.

I was beginning to get sore all over again. Crew knew we were coming. He certainly must be here. I put the toe of my shoe against the broad white panel of the door and pushed. The door swung inward exposing the lighted hall beyond, but nothing moved in the hall, no sound reached us.

I punched the bell again. The chimes sounded louder with the door wide, but they were the only sound.

I muttered something under my breath, then stepped into the hall, calling Crew's name.

Nothing happened. I didn't know what to do. The idea of walking into a man's house was not one I liked even under these circumstances.

"Crew!" I called again and walked to the entrance of the small den. Crew was there all right, but he wasn't seated at the small gold and ivory desk, nor did he occupy one of the comfortable chairs. He was stretched across the center of the white carpet, lying on his back with blood coming out of a hole on the left side of his tan sport shirt.

I MOVED across to him quickly and knelt down, forgetting all about not touching the body and other rules. I supposed that maybe he was still alive. After all, I'd talked to him on the phone less than twenty minutes before.

But he wasn't. He was dead, even if there was still a little warmth in his body. I straightened to find the girl standing in the doorway behind me, staring at the dead man, then she raised her grey-green eyes and looked at me. There was something in the look which gave me the shivers and I said more defensively than I intended:

"He was alive just a little while ago. I talked to him on the phone. You heard me."

"Did I?"

I stared at her. "Meaning what?"

She moved her shoulders in a tiny gesture. "I heard you talking, but I'm not certain there was anyone at the other end of the line. In fact, I'm not certain that there wasn't."

I'd never met a woman who had the ability to make me angry so quickly and so often. I started to answer her, then choked.

"Meaning you think I knew Jim Crew was dead before I called his number, that the call was nothing but a plant? Why, you little fool, feel the body."

She shivered and drew back half a step, but I wasn't going to let her get out of it so easily. She was my only witness. If she suspected me and communicated her suspicions to the police, I'd be in a fine mess.

I stepped quickly toward the door and caught her wrist, dragging her forward into the little room. "No, you don't, pal. You've been shoving me around all evening. It's about time that you took a little shoving yourself."

I forced her forward, noting half-consciously as I did so, that her face was very white and that she looked as if she might faint.

But there was no softness in me. I put her fingers down on the back of Jim Crew's hand. "Remember how it feels," I said, "remember the warmth. That man has been killed since I talked to him on the phone and I don't want you to forget it."

She shuddered, pulling her hand back. "I'll never forget it, how the hand felt . . ."

"And the blood," I said, "that wound is still bleeding. Remember that too, because it's important. I may need all the help you can give me."

"I'll give you no help," she warned. "I'd like nothing better than to see you in the gas chamber."

I nodded. "Sure you would. You don't like me any better than I like you, and I'd hate to have to put into words the way I feel about you, sister. It wouldn't be nice. But whether we like each other or not, we'd better hang together on this, because if we don't, we'll do like the old saying and hang separately."

Her eyes widened and a little color came up into her white cheeks. "Meaning?"

"Meaning, this is murder," I told her. "You can scream all you want to about me stealing Great-uncle's money, but you can't scream about me killing Jim Crew, because I was with you when it happened. He can't help us, because he's dead. The dead don't scream either, they just lie there and maybe if we don't watch, we'll be dead too."

I had her attention now and it was obvious that she didn't know what I was talking about. I wasn't certain that I knew either, but there were a lot of thoughts crowding their way around in my head.

MAYBE Jim Crew's death had nothing to do with the hundred and seventy thousand which was tucked away in my safe. If so, it was merely a bad break, me and the girl walking in like this. But on the other hand, maybe it did. I couldn't forget the look I'd seen in Sloane's yellow eyes. If Crew had been killed because of that money, then the girl and I weren't in the sweetest spot in the world. For that matter, there were a couple more guys in a stew too.

I used my handkerchief to pick up the phone from the little desk and dialed Jack Cartwright's number. He answered at once, almost as if he had been sitting beside the phone, waiting for a call.

I told him what had happened and he swore under his breath. "You think Sloane killed him?"

"I don't know what to think," I admitted, "and also, I don't know what to do."

"You can't call the police," his voice was nervous. "If you do, the

whole story will come out and it won't sound so good. I can't afford to be mixed up in anything like this."

"Pal," I said, "no one can afford to be mixed up in a murder, but you're already in it. What's more, you might not be in such a good spot yourself."

I heard him draw a quick breath. "Yes, I hadn't thought of that."

"You'd better warn Jerry Norton, too," I added. "From now on we're all under the gun. I wish this Captain Barns had never left his sheep."

"You're telling me." He hung up and I realized that nothing was decided as to whether we should call the cops or not. If it hadn't been for the girl, I wouldn't have given it a second thought, but I couldn't be certain that she would keep her mouth shut. In fact, I was pretty sure that she wouldn't.

Another thing, the absence of Crew's servants bothered me. There should be some around somewhere. But I wasn't going to spend any time hunting them.

"Come," I told the girl. "Let's get out of here."

"Aren't you going to call the police?"

"You haven't had as much experience with police as I have," I told her. "Otherwise, you wouldn't be so anxious to call them."

"I haven't had as much experience in crime as you have either," was the nasty answer. "I have nothing to fear from the police."

I saw I was going to have trouble with her, but there wasn't any use in arguing. I grabbed her arm and pushed her out into the hall.

WE BOTH heard it at the same time, a kind of thumping coming from a closet at the right. We looked at each other, then I dropped her arm, went across and pulled open the closet door.

A small Filipino lay on his back inside the closet. He was done up like a turkey ready for market.

I hauled him out. His eyes were big, brown, and very wide. I knew even before I got him untied that he was scared silly.

He started to chatter as soon as I got his arms free. It seemed that immediately following my phone call, the door bell had sounded. He'd answered it to find no one on the small porch. Puzzled, he went down the steps looking around and someone came out of the heavy bank of shrubbery on the right and knocked him cold.

He hadn't had more than a fleeting glance at his attacker and had no idea what the man had looked like. When he came to, he'd been in the closet, bound hand and foot. He didn't even know Jim Crew was dead until I took him in and showed him the body. Then he broke down and started to cry. The rest of the servants were off, he and Crew had been alone in the house.

I called the police. Finding the servant changed the whole picture. He was bound to remember me and report that I'd been there. After I'd made the call, I looked at the girl.

"Listen, sweetheart. We came out here to arrange for a movie job for you and found Crew dead. You'd better play it that way. You don't want to drag your great-uncle into the picture, do you?"

"Why not?"

She knew why all right. She was just being difficult. I had the impulse to turn her over my knee again and repeat the spanking, but I checked myself and explained in words of one syllable. She didn't answer and I couldn't tell what she was going to do.

But when the cops showed up, led by Lieutenant Bryce from Beverly Hills, she never opened her mouth. It went off pretty well. Bryce knew who I was and the assistant D.A. he called was an old friend. I explained that Miss Barns was my client, that Jim Crew was giving her a screen test and that we'd come out to talk about the contract. From then on I told a straight story.

After an hour they turned us loose. I heaved a sigh of relief as I turned

my car back toward town. "You were swell."

She looked at me, startled. I guess that it was the first kind word I'd said to her since we'd first met and it took her off guard.

"I didn't do anything."

"You kept your mouth shut which is more sense than most people show."

"I wasn't sure about you."

"You mean about me being a crook?" I grinned a little into the darkness.

"Well, yes. Where are we going now?"

"Over to talk to Jack Cartwright and then down to see your great-uncle. As far as I'm concerned, he can take his money and go back to the desert. I've had more than I want."

CHAPTER IV

CARTWRIGHT lived in one of the newer apartments on the western extension of Hollywood Boulevard. It was a brick building, a regular rabbit warren of a place with a dozen entrances and as many elevators. We found the right one and rode to the third floor, went along it, and knocked at the door of Cartwright's suite.

A voice called from beyond the door, wanting to know who it was.

I told him, rather brusquely, and heard the rattle of a night chain. Then the door opened and I found myself staring at Cartwright.

I've never in my life seen as much change in a man in as short a length of time. His face had lost all of its high color. In fact it looked more like wax. His eyes were big and dark and the right one twitched a little at the corner. His eyes swept me as if he had half expected a Gestapo agent and then he looked hard at the girl.

I told him who she was and he motioned us in without speaking, shut the door and fitted the chain back into place. I was irritable and I let some of the feeling creep into my voice.

"What's the matter with you, man, you act as if you've seen a ghost."

"I have." The words had a stilted sound as if his lips were so stiff that he had trouble forming them. He passed a hand across his eyes and said in a slightly more normal voice, "I've just come from Jerry Norton's apartment. He's dead."

"Dead?" For an instant I didn't catch the meaning of his words. "Dead, what did he—" and then I stopped. "You mean he was murdered?" I asked after a momentary pause.

Cartwright nodded. "That's what I'm saying. He was murdered, shot in his own living room, lying there on his back. I walked in on him. It was awful. Hell, his body was still warm."

I knew how he felt. I'd felt the same way when we'd found Crew.

"What happened? What did you do?"

He sank into a chair, burying his face in his hands. "I, nothing, nothing at all. I came away. I—I was upset. I—they'll be after me next."

"Who?" I demanded. "Who will be after you? What's this all about? Who will be after you?"

I REPEATED the last because he gave no sign of answering. I've never seen a man so shaken before. Fear went through him like a pin in a punctured balloon.

"I don't know, the same men that got Jim Crew, the same men that killed Jerry. I'm the only one left."

"What do you mean—the only one left?"

He wet his lips nervously. "We three, we were kind of unofficial partners. We developed a lot of things together."

"Like the mine you stole from Cap Barns," the girl cut in, speaking for the first time.

"We didn't exactly steal it," he said, but there was no fire left in him. "It was a business transaction."

"A fine business transaction," she sneered, but he did not even look in her direction.

"I've got to get out of town," he told me. "I've got to get away from here quick."

"Not yet you don't." I was getting fed up with all his whining. "There are some things to straighten up first. Who are you afraid of, anyhow, Sloane?"

He shuddered. "That's the trouble. I don't know who to be afraid of. A man makes a lot of enemies in his lifetime, a lot of enemies."

"Especially if he's a crook," said the girl. She'd transferred her attack from me to him, but it did her no good, for he wasn't hearing what she said.

"All right," I told him. I was disgusted with myself. For a long time I'd looked on Jack Cartwright as a big shot, and here he was going all to pieces.

"You're going over to Barns' hotel with me and we'll tell the Captain that the picture deal is all off and that I'll return his money. He can give it to Sloane or to anyone else that he cares to."

"Are you quitting?" The girl turned scornful eyes on me.

I stared at her in amazement, then I laughed, only there wasn't any mirth in it.

"You're the darndest dame that I've ever run up against," I told her. "You use a gun to try and make me quit and then you get sore because I agree to."

"That was before I knew you," she said.

"Watch out," I warned her. "I could almost take that as a compliment."

"It is," she told me. "I've decided that you aren't a crook at all, that you're just dumb."

"Thanks for the kind words."

She ignored my sarcasm. "And I don't want Cap to lose his money to those crooks that tried to hold us up. I'd much rather you kept it in your safe."

"You're too changeable," I said. "I've had all I want of this screwy deal. The sooner I give the old boy back his money, the sooner I can forget that I ever saw you—and sweetheart, that's going to be one big relief. Come on."

Cartwright didn't want to go. He protested that he'd be killed the instant that he put his foot out of his apartment, but I showed him Sloane's gun. I told him that I'd act as his bodyguard if he came, but if he didn't, I'd use the gun on him.

He was so shaken that he believed me. He got up meekly and walked between us down to the car.

I own that I wasn't as brave as I acted. The dimmed out street was pretty dark. I kept remembering how Crew had looked, lying on his back on the floor of that little den. The killer might be lurking around in the bushes, ready to take a crack at Cartwright. If that were so, I hoped that the guy was an expert shot for I was pretty close to the mining man. A stray bullet could get me as well as one that had been aimed directly into my heart.

But no bullet came. No one appeared. I got the car started and pulled away fast, heading for the hotel. It wasn't a big hotel, or a flashy one. It sat on Sixth Street, halfway between the downtown section and the park. In the days before the war it had been a headquarters for the racing men during the track season.

Now it was crowded as were all hotels and I expected to see a crowd in the lobby when we came in, but I certainly wasn't prepared for a riot.

THAT'S what it was, a riot. People were milling about excitedly and blue-coated officers were trying to bring a semblance of order. Cartwright didn't want to go in, but I had a firm hold on his arm and shoved him through the doors. The girl was at my side, then she let out a half-strangled cry and pushed ahead fighting her way.

For a moment I thought she'd taken leave of what little sense she had. Then I saw the figure at the center of the swaying mob and realized that it was Captain Barns.

Cartwright moaned as he recognized the old man, but he made no effort to push free as I edged him forward. Of all the people in the lobby, Barns seemed to be the least excited. He stood there staring at the circle of faces, answering the officers' questions without hurry.

It was fifteen minutes before the police got the lobby clear and I heard the full story. The way the old man told it, he'd been sitting in his room, his shoes off, his feet up on the edge of his bed, resting like after dinner. Suddenly the door opened and a man with a gun was standing there.

He didn't know what the man looked like, but the fellow took a shot at him and the bullet smashed the mirror on the dresser. According to the old rancher, this made him peeved, so he hauled his own gun out from under his coat and started blazing away.

The killer, whoever he was, ran, and Barns ran after him. He didn't see which way the man went, but he figured that he didn't have time to use the elevator and therefore must have run down the stairs to the lobby.

Anyhow, the Captain ran down after him, still in his sock feet, waving his big gun as he came. Everyone in the hotel had already heard the shots and when they saw the old man with the gun it started a near panic. Cops had been driving by in a prowl car, had heard the shots, and were just coming through the door as the crowd hit them going the other way. It must have been a swell mixup for a couple of minutes. We had arrived just at the end of it.

I finally convinced the police lieutenant that Barns hadn't broken loose from some asylum. When he'd left, we all went up to the old man's room.

IT WAS a big square place with a private bath to the right of the door as you came in. The bath made a kind of hall, and I paused in this to use the phone and call my house. Then I went in.

The place was all right except for the mirror. The dresser sat against the right wall and the bullet had certainly smashed the glass. I looked around while the bellboys were cleaning up the mess. None of us spoke until the door closed, then the girl went over to her uncle's side.

"You're certain that you're all right?"

He snorted. " 'Course I am. 'Tain't the first time I been shot at, I'll have you know."

"I know it," she nodded, a little frown making a crease between her arched brows, "but honey, this is different."

"Different? How different?"

"Two men have been murdered tonight. The producer, Crew, and Mr. Norton."

"What?" He'd been bending over, tying his shoes. He straightened so quickly that he almost cracked his head against the back of the chair. "Jim Crew dead?"

She nodded, telling him about it. "Don't you see?" she added. "Those horrid men, Sloane and his bodyguard, were sore because you didn't buy that old studio from them. They killed Jim Crew and Norton and came after you."

He turned his bright old eyes first to Jack Cartwright, then to me. "That right?"

Cartwright shrugged and sank wearily on the bed. I told him, "I don't know and I don't care. We couldn't go ahead with the picture Cartwright was talking about even if we wanted to, not with Jim Crew dead. As far as I'm concerned, I've had all I want of the deal anyhow. If you'll ride out to my place, I'll give you your money and forget the whole thing as fast as I can."

He stared at me. "Why?"

The girl saved me the need of answering directly. "Don't you see, Cap, those men you made that deal with, Sloane and Grit, have killed two men already. Mr. Page is afraid that they might kill him too." She gave me a

look from under her slanted brows, but I ignored her.

"So that's it. It was Sloane and Grit. I'll settle with them. Don't worry, no one ever took a shot at Cap Barns and got away with it."

I didn't argue and I was in no humor to hear him brag. "Do you want to come out and get your money or shall I turn it over to the D.A.'s office?"

"I'll come and get it," he grunted. "Never saw a District Attorney I'd trust further than I could throw him. Never saw a lawyer I could trust either."

I didn't say anything. I just took Cartwright's arm and led the way from the room.

THERE was no light in my place when I turned the car into the driveway and parked. I led the troop across the lawn, unlocked the door and stood aside for them to enter. Then I led them back to the library.

Cartwright had recovered his color and some of his manner. I wondered, looking at him, how much of it had been an act. I wasted no time, but crossed to the wall safe and opened it, pulling out the packets of money and spreading them on my desk.

I saw Cartwright's eyes glow a little at sight of the money. Suddenly it was as if I could read his mind.

"It's never going to be yours, Jack, not one dirty torn dollar bill."

He looked up at me startled and a dull flush crept into his cheeks. "What are you talking about?" His voice had a savage note not belonging there.

"It's easy money," I said. "And you like easy money, don't you? You always have, you and Jerry Norton and Jim Crew."

He gulped a little in surprise. I don't think that anyone had ever talked to him quite like this before. "If this is a gag—"

"It's no gag," I said, "I'm giving it to you straight. The three of you robbed this man," I indicated Captain Barns with a wave of my hand, "of some mine. I don't know the details and—"

"Robbed, did you say?" The old man straightened. "Robbed . . . no, Mister. Jack Cartwright didn't rob me of nothing. He was a friend of mine. He helped me sell the mine, but it wasn't his fault that the skunks issued me a lot of stock and then charged assessments that I couldn't pay."

"They did rob you too," the girl cut in. "Just because you think that Cartwright isn't responsible doesn't make it so."

"That's just like a woman," the old man grumbled, "always spouting about something she don't understand. 'Tain't anyone going to cheat me. Ain't anyone smart enough."

She looked toward me and for the first time there was an appeal for aid in her eyes, but I wasn't helping her. I just stood there, waiting.

"You're a fool," she lashed out at him. "You let Cartwright and those men steal your mine, then you get mixed up with a gambler like Sloane who's going to sell you a wreck of a movie studio."

The old man said in a hurt voice, "I was doing it for you, honey. I wanted you to be an actress, a big star, a—"

"You can't buy those things." Her voice had softened. "Can't you see, all these men were playing you for a sucker. Well," she was looking at me again, "maybe the lawyer wasn't. I haven't made up my mind about him, but the rest were. If there hadn't been two separate crowds after your money, they'd have gotten away with all of it."

CARTWRIGHT licked his lips. He was still shaken but he had recovered something of his usual manner. "I think that you're laboring under a misapprehension, Miss Barns. I was only trying to save your uncle from falling into Sloane's clutches. Two of my friends have been killed in so doing and—"

"Meaning I killed them?" Bernhardt Sloane was standing in the

doorway, a gun in his hand. Joe Grit was directly behind him.

The smaller man stepped around his partner so that the guns he held covered everyone in the room.

Cartwright's face was so white that it looked as if it were carved out of chalk. The girl wasn't much better, but the old man merely chuckled.

"Come in, boys."

Sloane looked at him strangely. "You don't seem very worried," he said.

"Why should I be worried?" Captain Barns seemed to be enjoying some secret joke of his own. "I ain't worried. No one's mad at me."

"I might be," said Sloane, biting off his words. "You backed out of a business deal with us and I don't like people that back out of deals."

"Who backed out?" The old man sounded as if he were insulted. "I never backed out of a deal in my life. If you've got the deed for that studio with you, pass it out and my lawyer will pay you now."

They stared at him hard, then Sloane laughed and it was a short, hard, sharp sound. "If this is a bluff, we'll call it now." He drew a folded paper from his pocket and slapped it on my desk.

"Pay off?" He was staring at me, his hard eyes daring me to refuse.

The girl said, "No." She said it sharply. "No, Lou, don't give them the money."

I glanced toward Captain Barns. "What about it?"

"Pay them," he said. "A deal's a deal."

I turned toward the desk and for the second time that night I opened it under the threat of a gun.

At first Joe Grit kept watching the full room, but when I began to drag out the money and spread it on the desk top, his excitement at the sight of all that cash got the better of him. He stepped forward.

I guess that was all that the old man had been waiting for. I don't know how he got his gun out so fast, but suddenly it was in his hand and his first heavy slug knocked Joe Grit down. The second caught Cartwright who'd been standing against the wall and floored him.

It was that shot which killed Captain Barns. That bullet should have been sent into Sloane's body. It wasn't, and the moment gave the gambler time enough to draw his own gun and shoot the Captain.

Barns just had strength enough to fire in return, then he collapsed. But the one shot was enough for it caught Sloane directly in the forehead.

IT HAD all happened so fast that I'd had no time to do anything. I just stood there in front of the safe, my hands full of money. The girl and I looked at each other, then I put down the money and examined the men. They were all dead.

She didn't need me to tell her that the Captain was gone. She walked over to him and stood looking down, then she turned around and looked at me. "We don't have to tell them, do we? We can say that it was Sloane, trying to steal the money."

I tried to look blank, but I didn't manage it very well for she added, "You know, don't you?"

"I guessed," I admitted. "It didn't make sense any other way, but how did you know?"

"Because he shot Cartwright deliberately. I was watching him and it was no accident."

I nodded and she went on, "I know why, too. Cartwright and Norton robbed him of that mining property ten years ago. There was a third man in on the deal but we never knew who it was."

"Jim Crew?" I suggested.

She nodded. "I see it all now. I should have suspected it before, since Cap was smart and always had a good reason for everything he did. But I thought he was getting old and childish."

"There was nothing childish about

him," I told her. "He staged this whole thing and very clever he was. He was trying to find out who Cartwright's secret associate was. He knew that only the sight of easy money would smoke the man into the open, so he got some money.

"Then he played it really smart. He brought it to me, knowing I'd notify Cartwright. He'd cooked up this deal with Sloane purposely. He knew what kind of a man Sloane was and he thought Sloane would be blamed for the murders.

"Cartwright and Norton mentioned Crew, and Cap had found the man he was looking for. Then he went ahead with his killing, pretending that attack on himself at the hotel."

She said. "You were suspicious of him. I could tell by the way you acted. What was it that made you suspicious?"

"The mirror in Cap's hotel room," I told her. "It was broken, apparently by the murderer's bullet. According to Cap's story, the murderer stood in the room door and fired. That's impossible, because the bathroom is built into one corner of the room and the dresser stood against the side wall in such a position that a bullet fired from the doorway couldn't strike it."

I turned and gathered up the money, starting to put it into the case. She asked what I was doing and I told her. "It's yours now."

"The police will need it for evidence," she said. "Better put it back in your safe."

"You trust me?" I managed to sound surprised.

She smiled then. "Well, we'll see. I—I think you're a good lawyer and —you'd better call the police." I had taken a half step toward her. "Other things can wait until after we've talked with them."

Hot Money Freeze-Out

By George N. Laws

When that penny-ante crook finally reaped a big-time jackpot, there was a certain old proverb that he should have remembered—the one that begins, "The bigger they come . . ."

THIS TIME Van Sant won the struggle with his fear almost without conscious effort. When he passed the big flatfoot under the street light, his lined sallow face was as calm as a bowl of rice pudding. A month ago, seeing a cop, he would have flattened into a dark doorway instinctively, being a petty thief and a small-time hustler with minor crimes too numerous to mention on his mind.

It was a little different now. After all, if that copper only knew it, Van Sant was the hottest thing in town, with thirty thousand dollars to his credit and murder to his debit. And a big-timer couldn't afford to let a mere harness-bull give him the shakes.

It was wonderful, being in the big time. Even if it was accidental. It gave him a feeling of power. Why, this time the fear had been only a ripple, only a little worm of cold wriggling between his shoulders.

Van Sant chuckled to himself. He felt expansive, fearless, daring, capable. And why not? Thirty thousand dollars in a suitcase under his hotel bed; not a rap out for him anywhere that a ten dollar fine wouldn't blow down; not a fingerprint anywhere to trip him up.

He drew his foxy, pointed little chin down into the fine silk scarf, and liked the feel of it and the feel of the good stuff in his overcoat. Pretty nice, he thought, pretty nice. He felt warmth and confidence throughout the sparse length of his scrawny body.

Of course, there was that little matter of murder. But he hadn't meant to do it, so his conscience was clear. Moreover, there wasn't a chance they'd ever pin it on him.

How could they? The man had never been identified. The police, after a routine checkup, had let the case die. Van Sant knew enough of such matters to know he was safe as a church.

He had just run into this guy all of a sudden. Matter of fact, Van Sant had been coming out of a strange hotel room, with a swell couple of studs and a nice watch in his pocket, when the guy blew in. The fellow had been too surprised even to make a beef to wake up the other guests. In pure reflex, Van Sant had picked up a book end in his gloved hand. While the guy was still goggling, he had given him a good full arm swing on the side of the head.

It never occurred to Van Sant that he'd killed the man or he would have fled in blind panic. As it was, being a fairly cool boy in the clutch, he had simply picked up the good-looking leather bag, walked down two flights to the lobby, and eased his way out through the mob. After all, he figured, a bag that good was worth picking up; it could be sold, and it's never smart to pass up an honest dollar.

AN HONEST DOLLAR! Van Sant chuckled again. You could have knocked him over with a soda straw when he opened it up, back in his own place. Enough of that folding stuff to stock a branch bank. Enough of that green lettuce to open a vegetable stand.

Enough so that he'd never have to turn a small-time trick again as long as he lived. It was great to be in the big-time!

Of course, a big chunk of it was in new bills, all C-notes. Van Sant had a hunch it was hot money, too hot to handle for the present. But there was at least five thousand in good, honest, wrinkled-up bills of family sizes, fives, tens and twenties.

That was plenty to keep him a long time. Plenty to get him out to the coast, to buy him a little cigar store with a phone in the back room, where the boys who liked to try to beat the ponies could chunk in a few bucks every day to keep good old Van Sant eating.

And it was plenty to give him a feeling of power, enough to make him feel big, and that was even more important than the luxuries of the present or the security of the future. Power! That was the stuff!

Van Sant had to laugh again. He'd taken plenty in his day; plenty of lip off coppers and hustlers tougher than himself; even from cheap help in cheap hotels. No more of *that*, no sir!

Brother, how he had burned up that dumb chambermaid when she had burst into his room the first day after that sudden windfall had brought him that new feeling of bigness. An Astorbilt couldn't have done it any better. And she had had to take it, that was what made it seem so rich to Van Sant; that was what had made it fun to carry on the gag, putting her in her place, making her life miserable, watching the stifled rage burn in her mean black eyes like little acetylene torches.

Well, that was a minor pleasure he'd soon have to give up. He was on his way out right now. A good train to the coast, a few years to get the heat off the big money; in the meantime, plenty for a simple, honest guy like good old Van Sant. He felt wonderful.

He flipped a hand at the clerk as he walked into the hotel.

"Get my bill ready, Sam," he said. "Got a train to catch!"

On his way to the elevator, he gave a condescending nod to Arthur, the big, useless hotel dick.

And to make his evening complete, in the hall he ran into that big, dumb chambermaid with her arms full of soiled linen. By a little clever footwork, he contrived to bump into her and her bundle. Boy, what a perfect send-off! Her look of helpless fury was a regular horse-laugh.

The bag was already packed, mostly with money. Van Sant had always traveled light, and there was plenty of time to buy more clothes on the coast. He unlocked the bag, picked up his things from the bathroom. The shaving brush was still damp, so Van Sant picked up one of the hotel towels to wrap it in.

Then a thought struck him and he grinned a mean small grin. Might as well take two or three more towels and give that chambermaid a little extra grief as a farewell gift. So he did.

HE STOPPED at the desk and pulled out a thick clip of bills with a gentlemanly flourish. Arthur, the hotel dick, was mumbling over a house phone. Van Sant paid off and picked up his change. Arthur was now walking over toward the desk. That little worm of fear crawled between Van Sant's shoulders again, but he shrugged it off.

What the hell was this, anyhow? Arthur had him by the arm!

Very polite, but very firm. Arthur was saying, "Let's have a look in that bag, if you please, Mr. Van Sant. Un-

derstand you have some of the hotel linen in it." That was when Van Sant began to struggle, and that must also have been when Arthur smacked him.

Van Sant's head was ringing like a Chinese gong when he came to. At first he thought he was paralyzed; he couldn't get up. But then he saw it wasn't paralysis, he was simply handcuffed to a big hotel chair. Through the ringing in his head and the fear in his heart, he could hear Arthur talking on the phone, see Arthur's eyes getting bigger and bigger. And there was that damned suitcase on the desk, with the towels and the clothes pulled away to expose the money.

And there he had to sit, bankrupt of all feeling of power and worse, barely noticed in the excitement. For even when the two big homicide dicks came to take him away, it wasn't Van Sant who held the spitlight, it was Arthur and that big dumb chambermaid.

"My goodness, lieutenant," she was saying, "I never meant to cause such a beef." And to Arthur:

"I just wanted to see Mr. High-and-Mighty do a slow burn about those towels. What they got him for, bank robbing?"

Arthur looked important. "Murder and kidnaping, Mrs. Clancy, that's all. You see the dough in that suitcase? The lieutenant says the numbers on the bills proves they're the ransom money in the Mendelof case. Can you imagine, he's the guy that knocked off that poor little Mendelof kid! Well," and Arthur shook his head at the wickedness of many, the futility of crime, and the inscrutable ways of providence, "he'll get the chair for this, and he'd never of been caught if you hadn't checked the towels!"

Mrs. Clancy sniffed. Those black eyes, with the mean glow in them, flicked Van Sant with a look of frank distaste. "I know his type, Arthur," she said, "and with that type, I *always* check the towels!"

Red Runs the Devil's Lake

By Tom Marvin

★ ★ ★

Twelve years ago gang chief Wingy Pilgrim made his fatal dive through that bullet storm into the Devil's Lake. And now Satan was ready to release a ghost—the gunman king's ghost that would drag the living bodies of the gang-busters back to those bloody depths.

★ ★ ★

HIS smirk knocked twelve years off my age. I was feeling again that old feeling, that I'd rather get slapped by a bear than take information off a stoolie.

"Wingy Pilgrim's dead," he said. "His guns ran dry, and he thumbed his nose at the cops, and dived off the ledge into Pilgrim's Puddle. Into that godawful pink water. He never came up. Blake, are you losing your mind? You were there and saw it all!"

Of course I had. And I felt silly as

hell mentioning it. But I'd come for some information. So I argued:

"They never fished up Wingy's corpse."

Irritably he shrugged his razor-sharp shoulders.

"Be sensible, man! Who could climb out of Pilgrim's Puddle? It's a spider-walk! Sixty feet of sheer rock. Straight down to a hell-hole of icy water. Slippery walls on *all* sides. Only a bird could get out of that trap. Wingy is roosting down there with the garfish and the carp."

He picked up a feather duster and began flicking his show cases. The twelve years since last I set eyes on Spry Fifield had given him and his shop just a once-over-lightly. The ragged awning read *Fifield's Cutlery*, and actually it was a cutlery store, too. The finest and oddest cutting tools lined its walls.

But in the old days Spry had had a sideline. Illegal guns. And the secrets he knew about his gun-buying customers!

"Wingy Pilgrim left a grown son behind him," I said.

The feather duster in Spry Fifield's hand slowed down, like the pendulum of a clock running out. Yes, the twelve years that had transformed me from a newspaperman wearing a dirty hat to a lawyer in striped pants hadn't changed Spry at all. He still looked as thin and treacherous as one of his own shivs, a grey, wizened, needle of a man.

"Jiggs Pilgrim left this town six years ago," Spry said gently. "Why your sudden interest in the kid, Blake?"

"Because my pal, Clint Chown, drowned Tuesday night in Pilgrim's Puddle. Some people think it was a simple motoring accident. His car crashed through the guard rail. But I hear it was murder. And I hear that I'm next on tap."

"I heard that guff, too, Blake. They're saying that Wingy Pilgrim's ghost has come back for vengeance. Because you and Clint Chown smashed his mob twelve years ago . . ."

"With your help, Spry," I reminded him.

"But do you believe in spooks, Blake?"

"Wingy Pilgrim's son was no spook. I want a meet with him."

His feather duster began swishing again, with finality, dismissing me. "I'm sorry, Blake. Another time perhaps."

When Spry got hard-nosed there was no budging him. I turned away. He let me reach the door before he called:

"Blake can you whistle?"

Ah, this had been his style in the old days. This had been his manner. "I can whistle eating crackers, Spry," I said.

"Then, suppose you're standing at the corner of Kardiff and Loke tonight? Let's say the northwest corner. Suppose you're whistling? Let's say *Birmingham Jail*. For old times' sake. Tonight, Blake, at midnight sharp."

His shoulders were still shaking with his sardonic chuckling as I went outside and got into the car. The storm was a drencher and when I reached the cemetery I stood around with my hat off, looking for a familiar face. Presently I spotted Duster Mack, who had worked with Clint Chown and me on the *Leader* in the old days.

"This is a hell of a funeral," Duster complained. "Everybody l o o k i n g scared instead of sad." He touched my sleeve. "Do I imagine it, Blake, or is everyone gawking at me as if I'd murdered him?"

"Well, if that danger sign had been lit at the S curve it might have helped," I said. "You and your stinking electric company!"

The rain oiled our hair and turned the tawny gumbo of the grave to plaster. Thunder grunted angry funeral music while we laid Clint Chown decently away. I knew why the mourners acted jumpy. Polly Chown was spreading that story. She came squishing across the cemetery lawn, a

frightened and waterlogged widow, and perhaps a bit daft with grief, too. I tried to fade into the crowd, but she laid a black gloved hand on me.

"Gangster grudges only die with death," Polly said softly. "Their death —or yours. And you're next, Blake Casey!"

I patted her sodden shoulder. "You need a drink, Polly. Wingy Pilgrim is dead. Clint and I killed off him and his mob twelve years ago. Deader than bones. So stow that foolish talk."

"You fool!" She shook her prayer-book in my face. "You believe Clint's car just happened to fall into Pilgrim's Puddle? I say Wingy Pilgrim killed him! And you'll die next!"

She said, "Ah, Blake," and her eyes widened with the little madness behind them, "Wingy has marked you for his own."

SHIVERING in the rain-soaked air, I got into my car with Duster Mack. When I switched on the heater Duster smiled. "It isn't that cold." I pointed the car back toward town.

"Polly's punchy," I muttered. "The street lights were off Tuesday night. The road was wet. A skid, and bang! Clint's car went through the guard rail. But just to make sure I'm going to have a confab with Wingy Pilgrim's kid, Jiggs."

"Getting skittish, Blake?" Duster asked. He looked at me curiously. "Is that story true, Blake, that once you paid Jiggs Pilgrim ten dollars to keep him from shooting you?"

"It was two dollars. But that was in 1931. I could afford to pay a little more now, since I quit newspapering and became a lawyer."

Duster got out of the car at the electric company plant, where a solitary pumper still was playing water on the ruins and the coal piles. He regarded the wreckage sadly.

"That's kismet, right in your eye," he said. "If we'd been able to supply current Tuesday night, especially to that danger sign on the S curve, Clint might have made it. But that damned boiler let go and the firemen didn't have a chance. We're piping in a little juice from Comstock."

Heading the car downtown, I thought, that's the way ghost stories start. The street lights fail on a rainy night. Clint crashes into Wingy's own puddle and immediately everyone sees spooks.

With the downpour sharpening my mood, I dropped a few tears for the old days, when Clint Chown, Duster Mack, and I had been the bright young men on the *Leader* staff. Duster had resigned to become personnel director for the electric company. Clint blossomed into a private investigator. He always had had Pinkerton blood.

That had been a giddy, sordid era. Nine-tenths of the populace scofflaws. Peephole joints, bad liquor at ten bucks a pint, men going blind, booze runners and their Kissel Kars, squealers machine-gunned with the insulting penny clutched in their hands—or dumped in Pilgrim's Puddle. The era of the One-Way-Ride.

But wher the *Leader*, with tongue in cheek, assigned Clint and me to clean out Wingy Pilgrim's mob, we did it! Two crazy kids. Now, I'd know better. One by one, with Spry Fifield fingering for us, we ran down the two-bit hoods. And then we nailed Wingy himself.

Back in my office, I thought, Jiggs Pilgrim would be thirty years old now. Hardly the same hot-tempered kid who had once traded me my life for two dollars, cash on the barrelhead.

I swung up my typewriter and wrote a letter to my mother up in Fond du Lac, enclosing my insurance policies. Then I typed another letter:

To Police Commissioner Kant:

If I do not report to you in person by 9 a.m. tomorrow, I shall have been murdered by Jiggs Pilgrim.

Blake Casey

The carbon copy I jammed into my pocket. The original I tore into a hundred pieces. If the carbon didn't work I'd be just as dead as if I had

mailed the original to that tough old cop.

I had ten minutes of waiting at Kardiff and Loke. In my Dirty Hat period I'd have made this meet with youthful zest. Now, my throat scratched. Was Jiggs Pilgrim as ruthless as his old man had been?

In the lush days Wingy had been undisputed king. Somewhere along the way he had lost his left arm at the elbow. But his right arm had only to point. Legend said men had died for staring at Wingy's empty sleeve.

Yet, he had no call to be sensitive; he was an able "wingy." Once I had seen him at a banquet for his loogans, sitting dumpy and blond at the head of the festive board, and he was feeding himself without assistance, waving waiters aside. Cutting his own steaks and pouring his own pink champagne.

Pink was Wingy's favorite color. For Pilgrim's Puddle held pink water, too. In my boyhood the kids had called that abandoned quarry The Devil's Lake, and said solemnly that it was bottomless. Actually it varied from ten to forty feet in depth, but it might as well have been a thousand. It was the dumpyard for Wingy's trash. It covered guns, cars, dead men, and at last, fittingly, Wingy himself. No wonder it blushed, the crimes that it hid.

AT MIDNIGHT I stepped to the northwest corner of Kardiff and Loke and puckered up. *Birmingham Jail.* Not good, not even loud. It may be a deathless tune, but when you've whistled it twenty times it turns you melancholy.

"Jeepers, shut it off!" a voice commanded behind me. "Around the corner is a station wagon. Hop in the back."

I shut up, turned the dark corner, and stumbled into the car. The Voice slipped in beside me. Another slouch, sitting indolently at the wheel, grinned at him.

"How was his whistling?"

"He ain't ready for the radio yet."

Both of these young hoods were hulking, bigger and smarter than my wasp-waisted, silk-underweared sniveling contemporaries. Kids are stuffed with vitamins these days.

The Voice frisked me. "You carrying a gun, mister?"

"Twelve years ago," I said, "You'd have inquired if I were packing a roscoe."

"Twelve years ago my ma wouldn't 'a' let me out this late."

When the Voice had tied a blindfold on me the station wagon began to turn corners, to cross me up. One of the kids lit a Turkish cigarette. WMAQ poured Hawaiian music through the car radio. The tires sucked and popped melodically on the wet pavement.

I felt a reluctant admiration for the feats that Spry Fifield still could perform. Did Jiggs Pilgrim know that twelve years earlier Spry had helped us knock off his old man?

In '31, Clint Chown and I had supplied the evidence which enabled Commissioner Kant to round up Wingy's roustabouts, drivers, and route men. Then Spry dropped the *big* whisper. Wingy Pilgrim, living in the top hotels with the pick of molls, was married! His wife and son, then about eighteen years old, were going hungry in squalor. Gleefully, Clint and I called on them with a carful of groceries and coaxed Mrs. Pilgrim into charging Wingy with abandonment. It appeared weak, but it turned out priceless.

The *Leader* insisted that fifty cops serve the warrant. At the sight of so much firepower, Wingy got panicky and fanned down a bluecoat. He leaped into his car and blew, but the cops shot off a tire as Wingy was rounding the S curve at the Puddle. Standing us off was too big a job for a one-armed man, so he threw his guns overside, waggled a derisive longnose at us and dived. He never came up.

The station wagon stopped its silly weaving and began to purr in a straight line. The Voice nudged me.

"Cat got your tongue, mister? What's eating on you?"

"I was wondering what Jiggs looks like," I said.

"He looks like a kewpie doll. But he plays rougher."

Jiggs had resembled a kewpie doll in the old days, too. Pink, blond, his hair as curly as wood shavings. When I told him of Wing's suicide he developed a sudden case of father worship. He yanked a rusted horse pistol from a bureau and pulled the trigger on me twice. But the roscoe wouldn't fire.

"Relax, kid!" I had hollered. "I got two dollars here for you! You want two bucks, kid?"

Like saying "kitty, kitty" to a tiger. But he lowered the pistol. I talked fast. "You can buy a quart of your old man's gin and take your girl stepping." You remember the '31 model of gin-guzzling kids. Jiggs stretched out his hand, and father worship died. While I was returning the horse pistol to the bureau, it went blam!

SUDDENLY the station wagon lurched off the highway and the tires began crackling on small stones. We rode about a furlong, the car stopped and the Voice commanded:

"Upsy-daisy, you."

His hand on the back of my neck guided me up a stairway—four steps—but when I lurched, trying to gauge the width of the door, he poked me and barked, "None a that!"

Inside, thick carpeting under my shoe leather, warmth on my face. Tobacco smoke. Wood smoke. More WMAQ guitar music. The Voice whipped off my blindfold.

The room was about twenty feet square. Venetian blinds covered the five windows. A four-footer burned in the fireplace. Frosted wall lights. Ivory grand Steinway. Portable bar, and a blonde girl wearing jodhpurs mixing herself a walloping drink.

She studied me deadpan, then picked up a flouncy pillow and sailed it across the room. It hit a man asleep on the brocaded divan.

"Eyes front, mastermind," the girl said. "A tourist."

The man was flushed, untidy, obviously snoozing one off. Waking up, he emitted a final snore, sounding half human, half bumblebee. His blond hair still was as curly as wood shavings, but the kewpie had grown lines around the mouth.

"I got your message," Jiggs Pilgrim said. "Sure, I killed Clint Chown. And now prove it!"

If he remembered the day I had made him two dollars richer he gave no sign. And suddenly I wanted to get out of there before he did remember. I managed to find the carbon copy addressed to Commissioner Kant and shoved it wordlessly into his hand.

Lips moving, Jiggs read it, grinning a Cheshire cat grin like his old man had worn.

"The old finger in advance," he said softly. "If you ain't sitting on hardguy Kant's knee tomorrow morning, then I done murder. Mister, you're tempting me."

"I've got a thousand copies of that letter," I lied. "Every night a friend of mine will mail one to headquarters."

"A thousand letter, a thousand nights," Jiggs mused. "I got three years of suspicion piling up on me. But won't you get awful bored, seeing so much of that billygoat, Kant?"

I turned away. In days of yore nobody did that, nobody left the presence of Jiggs Pilgrim's old man without being dismissed.

"You!" Jiggs roared.

He was a chip off Wingy's block. He said to the blonde in jodhpurs, "Slip me a deuce until Tuesday, babe." He took the bills from her and shoved them into my breast pocket. They jutted out like a handkerchief. Close, his breath smelled as if it were on fire.

"You got a clean hat these days," Jiggs said. Turning his own broad back, he dismissed me. "Take him out the back way."

The Voice pushed me into the kitchen and began to tie the blindfold. But he let me have a quick look

around. Oversize refrigerator. Elaborate electric range. How does this place have electric power? Is it near Comstock? The answer might have been in the thrumming murmur that filled the kitchen. It sounded as if the house had its own power plant, a whopper, too.

On the kitchen table lay the remains of a solitary meal. Plate, cup, saucer. But only one utensil. A curved knife, like a midget scimiter, except that the point forked into three prongs instead of a single spear.

The station wagon carted me back to Kardiff and Loke. "Sound your A," grinned the Voice. "Let's have a little Birmingham in boogie."

I took the two dollars from my breast pocket and scribbled a note:

Life sold cheap in those days, Jiggs, but it was still a bargain at two dollars. Tell your old man that he should have stayed dead. Tell Wingy Pilgrim that Blake Casey is going to nail him again—alone—for keeps and forever.

"Take this back to the kewpie doll," I told the Voice. The vitamin-stuffed hoods tooled away. I found myself whistling and enjoying it. *Birmingham Jail.* For old times' sake. Once it had been Wingy against Clint Chown and me. Two friends and a stranger. But now the odds were even.

TWICE that night I woke up in a snowbank. In my nightmare Wingy was shaving me with that one-armed-man's knife. The same type of tool he had used at the banquet for his hoods. With the sharp curved blade Wingy had sliced his steak, using a rocking motion. Then he turned the knife backhand and speared each morsel with the fork prongs on the tip. But in the nightmare he used the fork end to pluck out my eyes, like melon balls.

In the morning I drove out to Pilgrim's Puddle. Workmen had repaired the guard rail, splintered by Clint's sedan. Sixty feet down, the water looked as pink as a strawberry soda. Habitat of the scavenger carp and the gar. Home of the dead. Pink pigment in the soil, but blood mixed with H_2O looks rosy, too.

How had Wingy escaped that hellhole? Why wasn't he mouldering down there with the cadavers and the wrecked cars?

On the perpendicular wall across from me a jagged grey crack dipped down in a zig-zag course to disappear in the blushing water. A road arrow pointing to hell. This way down. Behind me, on the S curve, stood a billboard reading *Danger,* the sign that might have saved Clint Chown had it been lighted.

Standing in front of the sign, I lined up the grey crack with a cottonwood tree growing on the opposite brim, and beyond that with a farmer's concrete silo that stood about forty yards back from the Puddle's perimeter.

If I started at the silo and walked directly at the Danger sign, keeping the cottonwood in line, I'd come to the ledge directly over the grey crack.

That afternoon I bought a suit of long woolen fleece-lined underwear and a hundred feet of one inch hemp rope.

I napped in the evening. At four A. M. I parked the car behind the Danger sign, undressed, and stepped out in my longbarrels, carrying the rope. There was a smudge of moon, a dusting of stars. The silo looked like a lighthouse with burned-out lamps. One dim night light showed from the sleeping farmer's house behind it.

I lined up the cottonwood and advanced toward the billboard. *Danger,* it reminded me. Tying a small electric lantern to one end of the hemp I lowered it until it dangled just above the pink puddle. The other end I lashed solidly to the cottonwood and, taking a deep breath, lowered away. I could smell menace drifting up from the water like a miasma.

Thirty feet down, I ran my hand over the jagged grey crack. I touched only smooth rock, worn marble-slick by rain. The grey crack felt as slip-

pery as my own bathtub. Actually it was no crack; it was only a grey line. And it had been painted there!

Bracing my bare feet against the cold stone I walked backward down the wall. Night closed over me, cave black, impenetrable. The tiny light swaying beneath me was a mere firefly.

At the bottom, I inhaled and let go of the rope. The pink water burned like dry ice. I got my teeth under control and dived, running my hands over the Puddle's wall like a blind man groping.

Breaking water, I peered around for the light. When I saw it swinging a rod away my heart cut down a few revs. I paddled to it and clung to the hemp, resting.

Once more I submerged, deep. My hands slid over cold rock, then cold metal. A bulkhead. A bulkhead fitted cunningly into the side of Pilgrim's Puddle, a fathom under. With fast numbing fingers I traced its outline. Seven or eight feet wide, six feet high.

My eyes began to pop. I kicked again. Treading water, breathing through my mouth, I glanced around for the light. I looked again. The light was out.

No, it was gone! Halfway up the cliff it rocked gently, swaying, growing smaller in spurts. They were hauling in the rope.

Longbarrels give no protection against an icy heart. Stranded at the base of a sixty foot cliff, in numbing water, at four A. M. of a treacherously black morning. It should have been terror enough.

But they had more hell on the docket. A shattering crash echoed through the pit. An automobile shot out into the night above me. Like a great bat it leaped to the center of the sky, hung there, tipped lazily and plummeted—sixty feet. The pink pond boiled. A torrent of drops geysered over me.

There went my car! They had jobbed me proper. Jiggs Pilgrim couldn't wait a thousand nights. He'd called my bluff and caught me sitting pat with a bust hand.

I SWAM a few strokes on my back, to warm my stiffening body. The sky looked blue-black. That's no color for heaven. The stars were never higher. A night bird limped across the pit mouth, heavy-winged, tweeting.

More to keep warm, I circled the trap. On every facade I touched only satiny stone. No handgrips, as I knew there would be none. Pilgrim's Puddle or The Devil's Lake, I was caged with the carp and the gar and the cadavers.

Over the approximate spot where the automobile had foundered I submerged gingerly, testing for bottom. Going down, my nose stung on bulky metal, my legs tangled in steel. I swallowed a panicky mouthful of the pink stuff, chalky, bitter as physic.

Threshing to the surface, I dropped my legs more cautiously. They found footing. The car roof. The car rested firm as a boulder. Praying, I stood erect.

The water stopped at my collar bones.

Cold water steps up your brain power. That painted grey line—it's a marker for the bulkhead. Inside is another bulkhead, forming a lock. The layout connects by a tunnel and elevator with the silo. Everything's operated electrically, from the same power plant as the gadgets in Jiggs Pilgrim's hideout, the farmhouse up there near the silo.

Consider the advantages. Comes time to liquidate an undesirable. Encase him in concrete and push him out the port. It's big enough to handle packing cases. Even barrels of Pilgrim's needle beer in the old days. The water must have kept the beer chilled, too.

And that bulkhead, was it Wingy's ticket to life twelve years ago? Could the hoods inside have pulled him through alive?

Occasionally I floated off the car

top, working my knees like a frog, but I never strayed far. Dawn turned the water old rose.

When I figured it was time for free folks to be stirring up in the world I began to yell. The sun was dropping down the west wall when a kid's frightened face poked over the palisades. He looked like Gabriel come to blow his horn.

I hollered, "Ho!" and the face dissolved. If the kid was a Sunday Schooler, I must have looked to him like John the Baptist's disembodied head resting pinkly on Salome's platter.

The kid got good service from the cop house. Soon two bluecoats from the accident prevention squad were gazing down at me. A bosun's chair swung out and lowered.

When they hauled me over the ledge, my union suit dripping, one of them said, "It's a water monster."

"You know what I need," I chattered.

He handed me a flask from the medical kit. I drained it, picked up a rock and climbed back into the bosun's chair.

"Now what?" the cop asked patiently.

"My wallet's down there."

It took me four dives to smash the car window. But my clothes weren't inside. On the front seat I felt an unfamiliar brief case, so I carried it back up. Gold letters on the case read, *Clinton R. Chown.* I had stood all night on Clint's car. Even dead, he remained a buddy.

The brief case wasn't as waterproof as the label claimed. On a scratch pad, now stained pink, Clint had scribbled some notes to himself, like the half-thoughts a man jots down when he wants to remember Aunt Tilly's birthday. *Slip Spry 50 to check on Jiggs.* Things like that. But it meant that Spry Fifield was still playing the pigeon.

The cops dropped me off at a Turkish bath. After a porter had fetched some dry duds I walked to headquarters.

COMMISSIONER KANT'S secretary tried to outstare me, but I shouldered into the old man's sanctum and found him sitting, as I had left him twelve years before, daydreaming with his feet cushioned in the half-filled wire wastebasket.

"Why, Attorney Casey!" the old gaffer said with no cordiality. His feet stayed in the wastebasket.

"Wingy Pilgrim once fanned down a cop," I said. "Let's get us a warrant."

That got his feet out of the basket. "How's that, Blake? You can't serve a warrant on an angel. Even a black one."

"We're going down underground and try it. Get a squad."

The commissioner thumped his desk. "I had enough of you and Clint Chown running my department in the old days! Clear out!"

"And bring an explosives expert. I want to flatten the black angel's pearly gates once and for all."

Kant bellowed, "Blake, you got drink in you!"

"The Pilgrim mob is loose again, commissioner," I said patiently. "They evened the count with Clint Chown. And they took a whirl at me. Wingy Pilgrim isn't dead, believe me."

The commissioner grimaced and tucked his feet back into the wastebasket. "Go sleep it off, Blake," he advised.

"Wait, Kant. If Spry Fifield admits he sold a one-armed-man's knife lately—to Wingy Pilgrim—do I get my squad?"

Angrily his gunboats hit the floor again. "Let's get this twaddle over with," the commissioner grunted.

So I got my squad. Kant himself, looking dour, a young probationary to drive the prowl car, and the explosives expert, a baldish cop wearing cheaters.

The soup expert listened to my description of the Puddle bulkhead,

muttered, "Simple!" and threw his kit into the car.

"Look out for that stuff!" I protested. "It's dangerous!"

"So's a rocking chair, if you don't know how to rock."

We swung around to Fifield's cutlery shop and the commissioner ambled inside with me. Spry's head swiveled like an owl's, watching me, as I went to a wall case marked *One-Armed-Man's Knives* and slipped one of them from its staples.

"You sold one of these gadgets recently, Spry. To an old customer. With a tool like this you can pluck out a man's eyes, like melon balls . . ."

"For gosh sake, Blake!" Spry quavered. "Put it down! Wingy Pilgrim is dead, I swear it!"

"Then who bought the tool?"

"Jiggs sent one of his flunkies for it. The other day, after I telephoned him to arrange your meet."

Commissioner Kant snapped, "That's enough for me. Lock up shop, Spry. Go over to my office and wait for me. I want to audition you." He prodded me impatiently. "I'm getting itchy, son."

The probationary handled the prowl car like a jeep. We screeched into the farmyard entrance and the tires began crackling on small stones. The driveway *was* a furlong. Before the heap stopped rolling, the probationary was skimming across the grass to the silo and the soup expert was making tracks for the rim of the Puddle.

Commissioner Kant lumbered behind me up the farmhouse steps—*four* steps—into the living room. Tobacco smoke. Wood smoke. The fireplace, the ivory grand. The blonde in jodhpurs had one hand pressed to her mouth, holding in a scream. Her startled eyes flashed to the kitchen door. In it stood the Voice, fumbling for his rod. It was the slowest draw in history.

The commissioner shot him through the throat. Outside, a hulking youth was scrambling from a station wagon, heading for the house with gun drawn. The driver.

Kant tore aside a Venetian blind, broke the glass with his .38, and the room rang with sudden thunder. The driver jerked, as if he had stepped into a gopher hole, and pitched to the grass. He looked like an old coat lying there.

"In case anyone asks," the commissioner glared at me, "I yelled to him first to surrender. Regulations above all, in my department!"

THE BLONDE had crawled onto the brocaded divan, shivering. "Where are the others?" I asked her. She only stared at me, whimpering, but Kant seized her cornsilk hair and roared:

"You heard the gentleman's question!"

In his time he had called me many things, but never that. Pain stiffened the girl's white face. "In the tunnel!" she cried. "They're down in that hellish sewer."

"The new breed of moll, Blake," grunted the commissioner, "ain't much different than the old, when the going gets rocky."

"Get her to confide in you," I said.

I cut through the kitchen door to the silo, but the probationary on guard there wouldn't lend me his gun.

"Commissioner Kant is a stickler for regulations," he explained. "Say, this silo's got an elevator. What do they keep in the basement? Rutabagas?"

"Pineapples," I said. The elevator was merely a sturdy platform and it lowered me slowly, like a freight. It was black as licorice in the shaft, with dim slivers of light sifting up around the edges of the lift.

Although air seemed to circulate below, the tunnel itself was mouldy damp. In the wavering light of a candle stuck in a niche I could see sweat standing on the tunnel walls. The candle itself was enough to tighten me up, since it was pink, Wingy's favorite color. The vase be-

side it on the niche was pink, too. What, no pink posies in it? I thought.

I started down the drift. Every few yards 6x6 timbers shored it up. My feet made no sound on the earthen floor, and I wondered, if someone's in this sewer, where's he hiding? I passed two trundling trucks, both empty. Farther along, a lantern hanging from the ceiling lighted up the cavelike mouth of a room cut into the tunnel wall.

I pancaked against the wall and inched down to the cave and peeked around the corner.

Into Duster Mack's amused face!

"You should have rung the buzzer upstairs, Blake," he said. "Nobody starts down the elevator unless they buzz ahead."

I wondered with a vague puzzlement how I had ever regarded Duster Mack as a right guy. In this cavern, holding a gat on me, he looked like a mole, giving off his own peculiar odor of evil.

Duster said, "Come out, Jiggs. He's alone, all right." And Jiggs Pilgrim stepped from the shadows, his kewpie face bland, his wood shavings hair touseled. He was Wingy Pilgrim's pup, for sure.

"Looking for a meet with Wingy, Blake?" he asked.

They broke into echoing laughter. "Curb your impatience, boy," Duster Mack said. "You'll see Wingy later."

Jiggs Pilgrim grinned. "We left that one-armed-man's knife on the table for your benefit, Blake. We wanted to make you nosey. You're clever and dangerous. We figured you'd snoop around for more evidence and leave yourself wide open. But I thought we'd finished you in the Puddle last night."

"Clint Chown's ghost showed up," I said. "Where does Spry Fifield fit in?"

"He don't. We just tell him as much as we want him to know."

"Did you tell him about the electric company?"

Jiggs said slowly, "You know I have to croak you, Blake, don't you? I can't have this racket spoiled. Hell, it's better than any angles Wingy got rich on. Booze, snatching, gambling, any of 'em. Nothing personal, understand. But I'm top dog now. I hated to run Clint Chown's car into the Puddle, but he smelled the electric company job and a couple more I got lined up."

"From gangster to international gangster."

Jiggs shrugged.

"This country, that country, what's the difference? I went over there six years ago. Those krauts knew all about me. They made me a fancy proposition and they sent me to school."

"School!" I said. "They gave you a short course in dirty pool. As if you needed it. They taught you to make detonators, fuses, timing devices and such. Then you came back to suck America's lifeblood."

The kewpie doll thought it was droll. "Them heinies know all the underhanded angles and they're free with the dough. I greased Duster plenty to give me a job in the electric company. I carry in a few lumps of coal that ain't coal at all and mix 'em in the fuel supply. I scatter some other stuff around. And wham-o! The boiler lets go, the fire puffs, and fifty war plants can't turn a wheel."

HE WAS still grinning smugly when, outside, there was a sound like a fat man suddenly coughing. The muted rumble rolled through the tunnel. Jiggs wheeled, taut and listening. "That's blasting!"

"A man of your education should know," I said.

"Blake, you fool! That'll detonate my cache in the Puddle! I've got enough popping powder out there to level the town!"

But it was Duster Mack who really cracked. He turned yellow as chicken feet around the gills.

"Blake! You brought somebody with you!" He looked at me accusing-

ly, as if I hadn't acted cricket. "We expected you to play this hand alone. That note you wrote to Jiggs said you were going to nail Wingy by yourself!"

And then the enormity of our danger penetrated his traitorous dome. "That blasting will spring the chamber doors! We'll all drown like rats in this hole!"

"You two will drown like rats," I said bitterly, "I'll drown like a damned fool!"

The fat man coughed again. And then, like coils released, the three of us jumped for the door, We hit the tunnel in a triple tie. We started a merry little rat race down the black drift toward the elevator.

Duster forged ahead of us. Maybe he was the most scared. He ran with the pistol swinging in his hand, thinking only of his hide, too busy to fan me down. The deer and the wolves get along fine together when a forest fire is singeing their tails.

We pounded, only a yard apart, into the candlelight slanting down from the niche at the elevator. Commissioner Kant was just stepping off the platform. I yelled:

"You should have buzzed ahead, Kant!"

Duster Mack threw one frantic shot at him. Jiggs, without slackening speed, plunged ahead to give the old boy the shoulder. In one motion Kant sideslipped and unlimbered. He potted them like ferns. Two slugs, two ex-heels. Good enough, for candlelight.

"Up we go, Blake!" he ordered. "Here comes the flash flood."

Once more the fat man coughed. A finger of water wriggled under the chamber door and came gliding down the drift. It sprouted longer and fatter. I stepped over Duster Mack and reached for the pink vase on the niche, while Kant cussed me for the delay. By the time I got the vase down and jumped for the elevator my ankles were wet. We started up the shaft on the slow freight.

Jiggs' popping powder let go as we were scrambling off the platform. The explosives expert told me later that the pink water geysered over the Danger sign on the roadside. I know that it washed the silo; the air still was drizzling when we stepped outside.

Commissioner Kant looked at me sourly. "It strikes me as a hell of a time to be whistling. Lovely tune, though. *Birmingham Jail.* But you promised me we'd find Wingy Pilgrim."

"You dope," I said, "Did you think Wingy Pilgrim got through that lock alive? The boys hauled in his body and had it cremated." I showed him the pink urn with the silver name plate:

Wingy Pilgrim, 1889-1931.

"Even a pink jug for his ashes, commissioner. Drop me off at the Widow Chown's house. I told her that Clint and I knocked off Wingy Pilgrim twelve years ago. And now the evidence goes on her mantlepiece."

Jail, Jail, the Gang's All Here!

"Dizzy Duo" Yarn

By Joe Archibald

Snooty Piper figured that being a philatelist was one way of stamping out crime. Only the nitwit newshound forgot that even the best stamps get cancelled.

THERE are two citizens in the world that defy you to say what they will do next. One is Hitler and the other is Snooty Piper. Me and Snooty work for Mr. Oswald Guppy, owner of the Boston *Evening Star*, but we know if some crime does not occur in the Hub in the near future, we will both become very expendable.

It is one afternoon just after the last edition has been tucked into bed that me and Snooty feel quite depressed. I am perusing an ad in Mr. Guppy's paper that says any citizen can learn to run a lathe in a few hours.

"Well, it will give me a chance to work on my hobby for awhile," Snooty says. "Which reminds me, Scoop. I am meetin' the pigeon at the Greek's at five. She has a 'tete-beche' to show me. Issue of the Republic of Rutabaga, 1902."

"Look," I says. "This left ear has bothered me a little of late, Snooty. Come again, please?"

"Huh? Maybe I forgot to tell you I was a philatelist," the crackpot says.

"I had an aunt was a fatalist," I

reply. "She always said if you was born to git killed falling into a concrete mixer, you could never expect to die of arsenic poisonin'."

"Oh, brother!" Snooty sighs. "What I said is a citizen who collects stamps, the rarer the better. Since I met Variety I've been one."

"Variety?"

"It is the doll's name," Snooty says. "At last I think it is serious. Variety Treadwell. She is much more refined than all the other cupcakes I have pitched woo to. Huh, it is ten to five. Come on, Scoop."

"Why?"

We hike along Causeway and up Friend. All of a sudden Snooty's green hat flies off his noggin and uses a very ugly looking puddle next to the curb for a landing field. Something hits me in a very tender spot and I yell that I am shot.

When I get back on the beam, I see Snooty running across the street as if a character was on the other side giving away C notes. He escapes death seven times before he disappears from view. I lean against a pole and wait. Then he comes back and shows me as pretty a slingshot as I have ever seen.

"I got the little Commando, Scoop," Snooty says. "I heard he has been terrorizing the neighborhood for a week. Wonder where he got the vital material for this weapon, huh? He was a fat boy and couldn't quite squirm through the hole in the fence. I bet he won't be delinquent no longer, Scoop. Well, we must hurry."

We enter the Greek's. Snooty's doll is already there and sipping a beer. Variety is a brunette with all the curves of a hatrack. She is the weary looking type and is always wondering what to do with her hands like Zasu Pitts. She is reclining in a corner of the booth, but her feet still block traffic out on the floor. If the babe had a pound and a half less red points on her chassis, she would have been a skeleton.

"Hello, darlin'," the doll greets Snooty, and flashes as much ivory as a spinet. "This must be that Scoop you told me about. And you've been kiddin' me, Snooty. His hands do not brush the floor when he walks."

"My pal is a card," I says with a laugh as weak as a rabbit with leukemia. "Someday I will knock him so flat you can mail him in any slot."

Snooty and the frill ignore me and start talking stamps. About good mint Silver Jubilees from Somaliland and Tobago. Imperforates, Surcharges, Bisects, and Reprints. Variety says she actually saw with her own eyes a British Guiana, one cent, 1856. And a Boscawen, 1846.

"It is almost unbelievable, Scoop," Snooty says to me. "A Boscawen is worth fifty-five thousand bucks!"

"It must be awful expensive to live there, then," I says. "I would like to meet one of them foreigners who can afford to pay fifty G's just to mail a letter."

Snooty and the bim exchange disgusted glances and then eye me as if I had fur on with stripes down my back.

"How much will it cost me these days?" I go on. "To mail a letter to a gal in Chelsea?"

"I'll see you around, I'm afraid," Snooty says loftily.

"Okay," I says. "You better feed this cupcake before a Yarvard medical student spots her. They are short of cadavers in the lab there."

Variety says something to me which proved she was never finished by Vassar or Smith or Mt. Holyoke. I was never so disgusted with Snooty Piper in all my life. I go on home.

IT IS almost one A.M. when the landlady knocks on my door. It is a very cold night and no bomber at forty thousand feet could have been more uncomfortable than that rooming house. Snooty Piper is phoning. He sounds more excited than a character who has found out how to make gold out of plaster of Paris.

"Scoop," the crackpot says. "It is

awful. I am drivin' the babe home in my jalopy an' stop for two gals of gas in Everett. There is a corpse here and two almosts. One of the survivors says he is a cop, but he is down to his balbriggans and has no badge. The proprietor of the gasoline oasis is talkin' to himself and has at least two compound fractures. Hurry over here, Scoop."

"Did you happen to call the cops?" I ask.

"I shall do it next," Snooty says. "Oh, it looks like the Nazi panzers passed through here. Hurry, Scoop."

It is only eleven below out and half a blizzard is blowing. When I arrive at the filling station in Everett there are some police jeeps there, a corpse wagon, and Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy wearing an ulster that makes him look twice as big as he really is which is enough. Snooty is huddled next to a Franklin stove in the little filling station tepee.

"I took Variety home an' come right back," Snooty says. "What a rhubarb was committed here, Scoop! Some crooks hijacked a prowl car an' took the uniforms off the cops. They took over this layout an' waited in ambush like lousy Jap snipers on Guadalcanal!"

We go into a back room where there is three autos stored. There is a defunct radio car gendarme on the floor. The corpse appraiser is attending to him. An M.D. who specializes in saving live ones is kneeling down close to the survivors.

"They didn't rob this joint," Iron Jaw howls. "There is almost two hundred fish in the till, so what did they want?"

"Looks like they needed transportation," Snooty says. "It is too cold out to be on foot. They wanted a jalopy with a heater in it. Can't you find any clues, Iron Jaw?"

"Look, Piper!" Iron Jaw trumpets. "It is funny you an' a broad just happened to stop at this station, ain't it?"

"Isn't it?" Snooty sniffs. "We took the police car we stole apart and hid it close by. We buried our Roscoes in the frozen ground outside. The doll dug the hole with her long nails. Don't act so silly."

The M.D. gets one of the cops so he can talk. His name is Maloney.

"Look, we just drove up here to git a bulb for a headlight," Maloney gulps out. "We git out of the car an' then they jump us. O'Gatty goes for his persuader, but a big lug has his all ready to howl an' down goes O'Gatty. I git whanged over the scalp with a quart of motor oil. When I wake up, I am inside this joint an' a funny lookin' fish wearing green is standin' over me. There is a moll with him."

"She was no moll," Snooty cuts in. "It was my doll. We stopped in for gas an' wondered why the place was closed and the door open at the same time. I heard some noises behind the counter there, an' went in, an' saw the citizen who runs this station all tied up and talkin' delirium tremens."

"Have you sent out the alarm, O'Shaughnessy?" I ask. "A prowl car containing two very rough characters wearing uniforms of the finest is on the loose. Anythin' could happen, couldn't it?"

Iron Jaw is a lot of detective if you go by size. Intellectually he is a dwarf and has a hard time finding a plate of beans in Boston. Once Iron Jaw fell on the ice and broke a rib; the cops had to call an engineering firm to come and help move him out of traffic.

THE cadaver cab and the ambulance move out and the cops start experting. Iron Jaw points to a corner of the little shack near a window.

"A dozen cigarette stubs," he says. "The guy who runs this joint smoked a pipe as it is right there. The crooks was waitin' here for almost two hours, I bet."

"That is a stroke of genius," Snooty offers. "All we have to do is find out who smokes that brand in Boston, Iron Jaw. There can't be more than

two hundred thousand citizens usin' that make of coffin nail. I have a hunch that another big crime story will break in the Hub before sunrise. A prowl car would git carte blanche anywhere, wouldn't it? Even in back of a jewelry store on Boylston?"

Snooty starts mooching about and picks up some letters on the counter.

"Don't you go stealin' stamps," I says to the mental deficient. "There won't be no issues of the Republic of Castoria, 1812, here."

"Touch anythin' an' I'll break both your arms," Iron Jaw snaps and pushes Snooty out of the way. "Well, the wounded didn't remember what the mugs looked like, so what chancet we got?"

"It is awful what the army left to guard our home front," Snooty sighs and leans forward in the chair.

Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy calls headquarters again. Suddenly he drops the public utility gadget as if it was a booby trap. Iron Jaw's big mug turns the color of lemon junket an he yelps, "Come on boys. It has happened!"

"What has?" Snooty yips.

"Over on Atlantic Avenue, near India Wharf, a truck was knocked off an' it was loaded with one hun'red an' fifty thousand bucks worth of hooch, is all," Iron Jaw gripes. "Another citizen defunct. Another in the hospital. A prowl car with two cops attacked it. Two other gorillas was in the car an'—"

We go over to Atlantic Avenue. We find the prowl car driven into an alley and abandoned like an orphan in East Lynne.

"The bootleggers are operatin' ag'in," a cop there says. "I just got to the scene just as the truck was headin' north. The snow blinded me, an' I don't believe I hit nothin' when I opened up with the Betsy!"

"This is awful," I says. "The third front opened up in Boston. The booze racket ag'in. Little Caesars, Scarfaces, an' Capones ag'in. Tommy guns, bazookas, trench mortars. I hope the U. S. arsenals are well guarded."

The gendarmes examine the prowl car. They take pictures an' look for prints.

"Who would not be wearin' gloves on such a night?" Snooty sniffs. "They won't find no prints, Iron Jaw. It is almost fifteen below now."

"You shut up an' keep away from me, Piper," Iron Jaw says. "Or you will git knocked colder'n thirty below. As if we didn't have enough trouble. Lemme look in that boiler ag'in."

"Come on over to that beanery across the street for coffee," Snooty says. "They won't git no clues. This looks like a perfect crime, Scoop. By mornin' there will be nothing left of the truck. The parts will be scattered all over the Hub or buried in the ground. The giggle juice will be cached out of sight in a rough boy's cellar. The cops' suits will be stashed in a furnace."

We go over and sip black coffee. About ten minutes later Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy walks in. He is grinning like a wolf watching a sub-deb's school let out.

"Well, in the mornin' you can read all about it, you drips," he says. "I am makin' an arrest. This time it'll stick. Gimme a pot of coffee, bub. Never mind the cup."

"What do you think?" I toss at Snooty while the flatfoot drains a pot of coffee at a gulp.

"Propaganda," the crackpot sniffs.

"I suppose you know who did it," I sneer.

"I am not positive," Snooty says.

WE READ it very early the next day. Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy has apprehended two underworld characters known as Alky Hall and Rosy Raviola. Both of the characters were very active in the pre-repeal days, and Raviola was very famous because of the red rose he always wore in his buttonhole.

Iron Jaw found a red rose on the floor of the prowl car. He also found that Rosy had no more alibi than a sprout caught with his hand stuck in

a cookie jar. At the moment, the paper said, Rosy Raviola and Alky Hall were in the grill room at headquarters, and Iron Jaw was keeping the broiler quite hot.

"Well, Mr. Piper," I says. "What do you think?"

"It looks as if the flatfoot had something there, Scoop," Snooty admits. "Let's go to the hoosegow."

Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy is so very delighted he even invites us in to see Alky and Rosy on the fire. Both of the rough boys are bulky citizens and are crowding fifty. They had cannon on them when surprised by the cops.

"The boys in the lab are workin' on the slugs taken out of the stiffs," Iron Jaw explains. "They will compare them with the stuff in these guns."

"They could have made a switch," Snooty says. "Why, how is everythin', Rosy? I thought you was legit."

"They won't frame me," Rosy snarls. "I am a respected florist."

"Then you should've known how to pin on a posy that would not fall off a lapel," I cut in. "Yeah, a rose and a crook like you by any other name—smells. Will you wear a posy when you sit in the sizzle sofa, Rosy?"

"How soon will they confess?" Snooty asks Iron Jaw. "We will hold the presses—"

"They ain't got half as much chancet beatin' this rap as Mussolini has of bein' the next U. S. vice-president," O'Shaughnessy says.

Alky Hall says he won't talk until his mouthpieces arrive. Me and Snooty go out of the gendarmerie. Snooty says he will stop at a drugstore and look up a number. Then we will go to the news morgue at Mr. Guppy's and look back into the past.

"Snooty," I says. "You wouldn't stand there with a straight face and tell me those two gobs of suet are innocent."

"They are as innocent of wrongdoing, I am sure," Snooty says, "as a porcupine is devoid of quills. But when a bank is robbed, every bank robber does not necessarily git a piece of the change."

"I see what you mean," I says. "It is all quite clear like the Rudolph Hess lam. You could see that crime was stamped right on their pans, Snooty Piper. Where was their alibis?"

"Stamps are very fascinatin', Scoop," Snooty replies. "They are as much of a study as Latin is to the Yarvards. Variety has got an airmail stamp, Republic of Ambrosia, which she thinks she will swap me for a Surcharge, Kingdom of Warland. The dope does not know the airmail stamp is worth five hundred fish as it was issued because of a historic flight made by an Ambrosian Admiral Byrd."

"You would even cheat at stamps," I sniff.

We go into the drugstore and Snooty looks up a wholesale grocery establishment in Chelsea. Then I follow the halfwit to the *Evening Star* where we go into the morgue and check back over criminal records.

"I am lookin' for citizens that were pals of characters like Rosy and Alky, Scoop. Always there were double-crosses markin' the spots where bootleggers were rubbed out. Ah, here is an account of an old gang war in East Boston and how many were slain.

"It says here it was all on account of a cupcake, a moll who played both ends against the middle and got squeezed for keeps. Her name was Dorchester Daisy. It says here she was Rosy Raviola's torch and caused more funerals than a flu epidemic. Interestin', isn't it?"

ON THE WAY out of the *Evening Star*, Dogface hails us. Dogface is the city editor and has not had a good laugh since his mother-in-law caught her nose in a mouse trap.

"I've been calling all over for you two," Dogface says. "We have decided to cut down on two lousy comics."

"I always said those two strips

were just lousing up circulation," Snooty says. "I can name them—"

"You should be able. It is you and Binney," Dogface says. "The only good crime story in a year and you muff it. Git what is comin' to you at the cashier's—"

"When you want us back, you'll git on your knees, you and Guppy," Snooty yelps.

"If you ever git back on this sheet, I'll eat your green hat," Dogface says.

"Wait, I'll git witnesses to that," Snooty says. "And without mustard or condiments of any kind, Dogface?"

"You ain't kiddin'."

We go over to the Greek's. Snooty Piper takes a magnifying glass out of an inside pocket and peers through the Sherlock Holmes monocle at a triangular piece of paper to which half a stamp is attached. He says he found it in the filling station in Everett.

"Huh," Snooty says while I try to think up something insulting. "There was a young sprout's face engraved on the stamp it looks like, Scoop. It is bisected with parallel lines. The words on what is left of this stamp were never taught in U.S. public schools. I must go over to see a professor I know at Yarvard. He is an expert on languages."

"Do you mind if I do not go with you?" I ask Snooty. "I would like to walk up and down Washington and read the want ads."

"Of course," Snooty says. "But meet me at 814 Main St., Chelsea, at five-thirty, will you?"

I meet Snooty in front of a dirty brick building on schedule. On the dirty windows of the ground floor establishment it says in big letters:

ANTON V. BOPESCU
Wholesale Groceries

"I wish I was sure you was sane, Snooty," I says. I follow him in and a crumby character says Anton is in his office on the second floor. We go up and walk right in.

THREE citizens are in the room. Bopescu is a fatso with a dome as bald as the cupola on the State House. He is chewing a cigar as big as a sash-weight, and he has a pair of eyes as sunny as a psychopathic shark's. The two ginzos with Anton never were choir boys. One of them is tossing a small bright object up and down in his hand.

"What you mugs want?" Bopescu blares.

"We are of the press," Snooty replies and sits down without an invite. "Lookin' for human interest. We would like anecdotes on your old pals, Rosy Raviola and Alky Hall. They are due to fry you know."

"I don't know neither of 'em," Bopescu says very testily. "I'm in the legit an'—"

"Once there was a doll named Dorchester Daisy," Snooty says.

Bopescu's two chins tremble. "Beat it," the oily citizen says.

"You come from Rutabaga which is in the Balkans," Snooty goes on. "The bums there threw in with the Nutsies."

"So that makes me a spy, hah?" Bopescu snarls. "What gives here?"

"You got a letter from a relative in Rutabaga only yesterday," Snooty says.

"Sure," Bopescu yowls. "I got a brother there, but what's it t' you, you weak-chinned—how you know I got a letter yes—?"

There are radiators sizzling in the office, but my teeth are rattling loose from their gums. I remember getting the same feeling once in the snake house in the zoo. I whisper, "Come on, Snooty."

Just then the bright object one of Bopescu's mugs is tossing hits the floor and rolls to my feet. I pick it up and look at it. It is a button off a cop's coat. You could have knocked ice cubes off my spine.

"You flathead!" Anton Bopescu yelps at his weasel. "It's a good thing I know these mugs know somethin' already or I would personally fracture

your skull, Louie! You an' Snig see they don't move a muscle!" Anton reaches under his desk and comes up with a Roscoe. Snig and Louie suddenly bristle with ordnance.

"Okay, boss!" they chorus.

"Well, sweetheart," Bopescu says to Snooty. "So you got a piece of that letter I opened, huh?"

"I have, you fiend!" Snooty says. "It is where you don't git it. You had time to read your mail while you waited to ambush the prowl car in Everett, huh? Then you raided the truck load of hooch with it!"

"Awright," Bopescu says. "Git up an' walk this way, punks!"

"That would take a lot of practice," Snooty sniffs. "You walk like an arthritic goose, greaseball!"

"At a time like this, he jokes, boys," Bopescu growls. "Well, what is two more stiffs? There's a three hundred grand profit in that booze we got stashed in the empty brewery, yeah. Wouldn't you like t' see that all in print, clamhead?"

We are shoved out through the rear of the wholesale grocery, across a courtyard, and into another building that smells. We go up six flights of stairs in the crumby hotel and are finally tossed into a room.

"I would prefer a room with southern exposure," Snooty says. "Right now a phone would come in handy, boys."

"Awright," Bopescu says. "I'm goin' out to mosey around and see what the cops know, Louie. I'll be back about ten t'night. Of course you know how chicken-hearted I am when it comes t' erasin' people. So by the time I git back, I don't want to see any signs of these punks. Make it a clean job. The concrete in the cellar is our bes' bet."

"Okay, boss."

ANTON BOPESCU goes out and his punks hold a meeting. Louie presides and appoints a cement-mixing committee.

"We got nearly four hours t' do the job," he says. "You an' Maxie an' Tiger can start work on the stone kimoners anytime now, Ziggy. Me an' Snig'll watch out here. They start yellin' for help, they git it quick, these jerks. No way they can jump. Only exit out through this room. Make yourself comfy, punks!"

They go out and shut the door. I am so scared I can't get strength enough to strangle Snooty. After awhile I says, "Did you bring a gun? Don't answer that."

"I got that slingshot, Scoop."

"Wonderful," I shiver. "I got a nail file. Why couldn't Iron Jaw be right for once?"

We hear Louie and Snig pour themselves some stimulant.

"What'll we d-d-do, Snooty?"

"Look out the winder, Scoop," Snooty says. "This room overlooks that all night beanery across the street and which is visible from this alley. I would say it was about sixty yards away, wouldn't you?"

"And if it is?"

"Slingshots do not make any noise, do they? It was lucky that little Commando attacked us, Scoop."

"This is a hell of a time for riddles," I gulp out. "We are close to gettin' planted in a cellar like we was vampires. Tell me more, Snooty."

"I shall disturb the peace," Snooty Piper tells me and gets out the slingshot. It is one of the biggest I have ever looked at. Snooty has eight little dornicks in his pocket for ammunition. He fits one into the slot and pulls back on the rubber sling.

"I used to be a champ with these when I was a sprout, Scoop. Look at the character just lifting up his cup of coffee. One—two—!"

Snooty lets go. We see the cup disintegrate in the diner's hand and coffee splashes into the counterman's physog. He paws at his eyes. Snooty lets go another dornick. It goes right through the window and spins the counterman around like a top when it caresses his pate. We see a citizen run toward the back of the beanery.

"I bet he is phoning for the cops," Snooty says. "Awright, here goes for the light globe over the door!" *Zing!* The light goes out. Snooty lets loose with another dornick and gets a customer right in the tail as he is about to enter the oasis.

"I'll save the rest, Scoop. Look for more ammo," Snooty whispers.

I find three pair of dice as big as ice cubes and hand them to Snooty. "There is a cop now, lookin' over this way," Snooty yips. "There's another

"They've spotted us," I whisper.

"Listen to the rhubarb out there," Snooty grins.

Then we hear Anton Bopescu yelling at the crooks out in the next room. "Look, you punks, the cops are surrounding this joint. How did they git the word out, hah? I got a good mind t' plug y' Louie! It's a good thing I hurried right back!"

"Listen, boss! They never made a sound! I'll eat this Betsy if they did!"

"They got two cars fulla cops out

cop. It is a prowl car, Scoop. Okay, gimme elbow room!"

Snooty hits one cop, then another. He sends one of the dice through the window of the police jalopy and then cops run into the alley, looking for signs of the Commandos. A crowd is gathering in front of the beanery.

"Look, Scoop. That cop lookin' up this way. Just after I slug him with this last dornick, you pull down the curtain!"

Zing! The cop doubles up as if he had eaten bad oysters in a month without an R in it. Another cop looks up and lets out a yell just as I pull down the shade.

there!" Bopescu howls. "Listen, they're downstairs right now. Oh, cripes, how they ever—look, we go in an' rub 'em out, then go down the back stairs. Come on, Snig."

"I saved the biggest rock," Snooty says. "I'm turning it loose when that door bangs open. Be on the qui vive, Scoop!"

"I wish I was on a trolley car going down Boylston," I says. "But I'm as ready as I'll ever be!"

THE door swings open. Snooty lets fire. The dornick hits Anton Bopescu right between the peepers and he starts to spin.

"Nice shot, David," I yelp. "You got Goliath!"

I make a dive for the slob's Roscoe, grab it, and fire at the same time. Louie lets out a terrible screech and slaps a hand against his right ear. Snooty throws a chair at Snig and it breaks up against the dishonest character's shins.

Anton Bopescu starts lifting himself off the rug and I ride him like he is a selling plater at Suffolk Downs and keep banging away at him with a lampshade until it is all out of shape. Snooty has his teeth sunk in the calf of Snig's leg and his fist halfway down Louie's throat; when the gendarmes arrive and sort us out.

"The f-fat boy," Snooty yelps through two loose front teeth. "He sabotaged the liquor truck on Atlantic Ave. He is Anton Bopescu an' has the stuff stowed in an empty brewery right here in Chelsea. I am Snooty Piper, police reporter an'—"

We are all carted over to the Chelsea clink. We ask that the local authorities invite Iron Jaw and some cops over to help clear up the sordid case. We have been given first aid when the company arrives.

"It was the only way we could git saved from an awful fate," Snooty says and then explains the attack on the beanery. "Bopescu here wanted a fall guy, so he remembered how Rosy Raviola once stole his torch and he planted the red rose in the police jalopy. But I was sure of this tramp's guilt even before Iron Jaw got the posy. It is part of a stamp off a letter from the country of Rutabaga in the Balkans that I have as proof. So it is a cinch the letter was not sent from Ireland.

"You match it up with what is left of the stamp on the letter Bopescu carries from his brother—but have they looked at that empty brewery yet?"

"We expect word any minute, Piper. How did you ever do it?"

"By bein' a philatelist," Snooty says. "It is one way to stamp out criminals. Hah!"

Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy keeps saying it isn't so.

"The professor at Yarvard said it was Rutabagan lettering on the stamp. So I looked up Rosy's old pals and saw Anton Bopescu was one, and that he was a Rutabagan. How many Rutabagan bootleggers could there be in Boston, huh? Anton had time to look over his mail while lurking in the filling station in Everett."

"Rosy Raviola had no alibi," Iron Jaw moans. "He never made an honest dollar in his life. I'm bein' took for a ride. I—"

The word comes in that the cops have found the cases of exhilaration dew. Anton Bopescu breaks down and oozes enough fretting oil to load a tanker for Murmansk. He lets a stenog book him for the braising.

"If I caught a fox in a hencoop with a big fat pullet in its mouth, I couldn't be sure," Iron Jaw gripes. "What chancet have I got?" His derby is on the floor, brim up. He mashes up his cigar and tosses it into the derby. Then he goes out trying to fit the brass cuspidor on his big noggin.

Me and Snooty ask Rosy and Alky how come they had no alibi when they are sprung.

"Wouldn't it have sounded nice?" Rosy sniffs. "Why, D.A., how could we have done all that when we was pastin' labels on bottles all that night?"

"Ha, that is rich," Snooty laughs.

"It is not funny," I says. "They are crooks also."

"You just prove it, is all," Alky grins.

Mr. Guppy does not have to kneel before us and Snooty forgets to remind Dogface he was to eat his green hat, because Mr. Guppy and Dogface says we get ten bucks more every week in our envelopes.

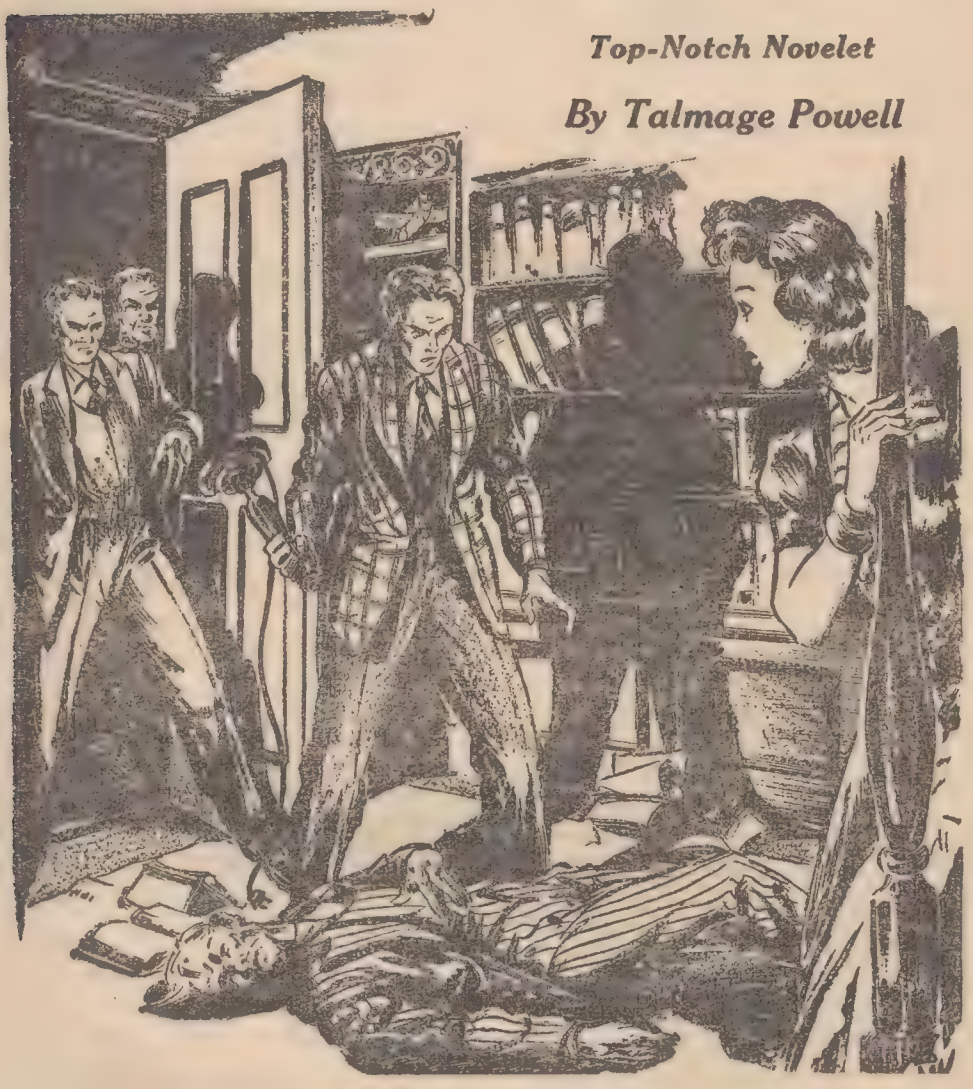
"Stick with me, Scoop, and we'll own this sheet," Snooty says as we go out.

I suppose you think the crackpot is kidding!

Page Mr. Murder

Top-Notch Novelet

By Talmage Powell



★ ★ ★

No one could be better fitted to guard the life of a corpse than the dick named Murder. And when the household that new cadaver had headed dipped its hands into homicide tangles, who could be better slated to join his moldering client than Private Detective Murder?

★ ★ ★

CHAPTER I

THE affairs involving Egbert Testerman's tadpoles, a Persian cat with a knife in its side, and homicide because of a cigarette case, began the afternoon I found myself keeping company with a corpse.

I tried three times to rid myself of the corpse. On the third attempt I was a nervous wreck. I decided to see Abner Murder.

The late afternoon sun was tingeing the cotton-like clouds in the west with copper when I pulled up in front of Murder's small, white bungalow.

I got out of my dilapidated sedan, wondering if my legs would see me safely to the door. I walked up on the porch, rapped. The door opened, framing tow-headed Ben, one of Murder's children. He only has six kids; a visit to his house leaves you with a montage-like memory of racing feet and shrill, childish laughter.

Ben displayed a jagged grin and said, "Hi, Luke. Pop's in the kitchen. What's wrong with you? You and pop hunting another killer?"

"Ben," I said, "you are growing up entirely too rapidly."

Then there was a yell from the depths of the house, "Come on in!"

Ben followed at my heels as I went through the living room. Jo-Ann, Abner Murder's slim, blonde wife, was dusting the furniture. I wondered how she managed to keep this riotous household running and stay so youthful and lovely.

Murder was sitting behind the kitchen table, blissfully inhaling creampuffs and coffee. He waved me to a chair opposite him, looking at me with mild, innocent blue eyes. He's got a plump, small body, jovial, pink-cheeked face. You wonder if you're being kidded when you take a look at his physiognomy and then learn that his name is Abner Murder.

He shooed Ben away, then looked back at me. "What's the matter, Sherlock? Anything happened at the offices of Murder and Jordan, Investigations?"

"Plenty," I said, "and you've got to stop absorbing those damn creampuffs long enough to give me a hand."

He bit into another puff and I leaned my elbows on the table. "This is serious, chief, plenty serious. Right after you left the office at noon, telling me to lock up tonight, a guy comes in—Reid Testerman."

Murder's eyes brightened. "The Testerman who owns the dozen night clubs all over the state? Who made Big Business out of entertainment?"

"That is the gent," I said. "And knowing that he was worth maybe a couple of million berries, I made him right to home, even gave him some of that Scotch you've been hoarding. He told me he wanted a bodyguard. I said that was just dandy, that we were the guys to guard him."

"And then?"

"Then he got killed."

Murder grimaced. "You're a helluva dick to let a customer hire you, then promptly let him get conked."

"I wasn't on duty," I said defensively.

"You sound garbled; swallow hard and start all over."

IT WAS harder to swallow than he knew. "It was this way, chief. Testerman says he wants somebody to guard him between the hours of ten at night and eight the next morning. I tell him it will be fifty bucks a night, with a minimum retainer of a hundred bucks. He gave me a C note; but we weren't supposed to start guarding him until ten tonight. So I wasn't on duty."

"And he got killed right after he left the office?"

"That's right. Somebody must have thought that with a private dick on the job then would be their last chance to let Reid Testerman have it. And they gave it to him." I shuddered.

He munched the creampuff. "What do you want me to do?"

"It's your agency," I said bitterly. "You ramrod the outfit. Lay off the grub long enough to help me get rid of Testerman's corpse!"

"Oh, you mean he was killed in the office? Make up your mind."

"It was the cigarettes," I said wearily. "Right after Testerman left the office, I discovered I was out of smokes. I had a carton in my car, parked in the alley back of the building. I went back there and he was sitting in the front seat like he was waiting for me. Only he was dead. Throttled. With a

woman's silk stocking. His face was blue, his eyes—"

"Spare me the gory details! Then what did you do?"

"I opened the glove compartment, got a bottle and took a slug. I stood there maybe thirty seconds, shivering and shaking. And thinking—of Testerman and cops. Ordinarily, a guy in my shoes would just have called the bulls and let them pick up Testerman. Lord knows I wanted to! But you know what the cops said the last time we found a corpse on our hands."

"That they'd take our license if it ever happened again."

"Yes. Well, I was going to be noble and go to bat for the dear old agency. I was going to dump my dead friend and forget him. I looked up and down the alley, thinking that I couldn't drive around long with a corpse—"

I was interrupted by the kitchen door opening. Her eyes puzzled, Jo-Ann came in the kitchen. "Luke," she said, "why is that cop poking at your car trunk?"

I sagged in my chair, gasping. Murder rounded the table, hauled me to my feet, and dragged me toward the living room. We peeped out the window. Little Ben was watching a hefty cop pry at the lid of my car trunk with a tire tool. The cop was asking him questions, glancing at the house, and working with feverish speed on the trunk, all at the same time.

Murder's voice was nasty. "Give!"

"I couldn't do anything else!" I gulped. "I knew I couldn't haul Testerman in the seat; I was afraid to leave him there in the alley, so close to the office he'd just visited; but I knew I'd have to ditch him. I crammed him in the trunk. It was a ghoulish job, chief. I tried three times to get rid of him before I came here, but people would happen along, and with only an A gas coupon, I—" My voice choked off as I saw the lid of the trunk give under the cop's prying. The lid swung up.

A beefy man, with a bald head that shone in the late sun, unfolded out of the trunk, hit the concrete with a sort of soggy bounce. From here I could see the ends of the silk hose that flopped from either side of his neck like a zoot suit necktie. He lay there, sprawled in an unnatural position.

I heard Ben yelling, saw the cop whirl, was aware that Jo-Ann had hurriedly left the house. In a daze, I heard Murder speaking, saw Jo-Ann and the cop meet on the walk. The cop intended to ignore her, running for the house so he could get his paws on Murder and me.

As he passed Jo-Ann, his big feet tangled with her dainty right foot. He landed heavily on his stomach, his arms outflung.

Then Abner Murder was dragging me out the back of the house.

ACROSS the street from us, the Testerman domicile, a huge blob in the darkness, did not look like a nice place to go. There were a few lights on in the house, but they only accented the mugginess. Murder and I had made ourselves very inconspicuous in a cheap hotel uptown for the last three hours, since the cop had found the corpse.

"You couldn't have picked a more screwy family to tangle with, Luke," the chief said. "And it's a cinch one of them did it."

I fidgeted, not liking the heavy feeling in the darkness. I said, "Fancy that!"

He was nettled. "Listen, you moron, Testerman wanted protection at night. Okay, so he feared somebody who could get to him at night, somebody right in his own family. Understand?"

I understood. Simple, sure. The only rub was that the family was big, a nutty sort of clan.

Murder said softly, "Come on." We started moving across the street, and that tight slimy feeling closed in on me.

We paused at the entrance to the walk, wary of cops. We'd given them time to come here and leave, but still

we weren't sure none had lingered. We started up the walk. Murder said, "Easy does it, Luke. We'll—"

Breaking him off, a thin wail came out of the darkness, almost like the cry of an infant. A weird trickle of sound, it came from somewhere in the expanse of lawn to our left. My teeth chattered.

"Shut up and come on," the chief said. I hesitated; then followed him as he started across the lawn. The pathetic wail would die, then crescendo again.

We got within ten feet of the sound. It was coming from the ground, as if someone—or something—was lying on the grass. Spiders with wet feet were having a fast race up and down my spine. I saw the blurred movements of Murder pulling his pocket flash and his thirty-eight revolver.

We took a couple more slow steps and Murder flashed on the light. The thin finger of the beam caught in two yellow orbs. There was a spitting sound, and a huge Persian cat flashed up into the light, whirled, and leaped into the darkness.

I let my breath out, almost going limp with relief. I started to wisecrack about two dicks being scared silly by a cat. But the crack died on my tongue. Murder's cautiously roving flash had picked out something else.

It was another cat, but this one wasn't crying. It was dead and it had been killed by a human hand. Its whole side was matted with blood and the ugly hilt of a dagger protruded just behind its right foreleg.

In spite of the fact that my spine had turned to an icicle, I managed to speak. "Finding corpses is bad enough, chief. Having the bulls find the corpse in your car is even worse. But somehow this is the worst of all—"

He straightened from the cat's body.

"A human cadaver I can understand, chief," I said. "But not this sort of thing. Who'd kill a cat—like this one has been killed? And why? It gives with the creeps, chief." I took a deep breath. "Let's go to the cops and take our medicine. Let's not get mixed with a nutty cat-killer. It might mean a shiv in the ribs, a shot in the back. There's no telling—"

"Sometimes I even think you believe in ghosts, Luke." He started toward the large veranda, which was a queer mixture of light glowing through the windows and shadows.

"Listen, Sherlock, we were retained by Testerman, remember? Then there is the matter of a license, our very livelihood,"—his tone was laying it on thick—"being taken from us. Not to mention the dastardly act of having a corpse planted in our car." He sounded very hurt. "And there ought to be a fee roving around in this house someplace. We haven't had a decent fee for weeks. We're still in business. Or had you forgotten?"

"How could I?" I stood quietly while he thumbed the bell.

The door swung open, and I found myself gawking up at a sliver-thin gent in a butler's outfit.

Murder said, "We'd like to see Mrs. Lettie Ramsey, Mr. Testerman's daughter, please."

"But, sir—"

"About her dear father," Murder said gently. Not so gently, he added, "We were the last people to see him alive . . ."

LETTIE RAMSEY received us in a drawing room that oozed dollar signs. She was standing in the middle of the room, more vivacious looking than lovely, small, trimly built, with her upswept auburn hair not quite making her look sophisticated. Her face was pale beneath her immaculate make-up, her eyes mirrored dazed sorrow.

The chief introduced us and said, "We were retained by your father, Mrs. Ramsey, only a few short hours ago."

"Retained?"

Murder nodded. "We are the acting

heads of Murder and Jordan, Private Investigators."

"Detectives!" she said, making the word sound so unpleasant I flinched. "My father made some sort of mistakes, I'm sure. He had no reason to hire a detective." She was talking too fast, I thought. She paused, looking at Murder, and abruptly changed.

"Please leave me alone, Mr. Murder," she begged. "Oh, to have to go through it all again. Sobs were dangerously approaching the surface. "Five years ago my first husband, Kneale Rivers—"

"I remember," the chief said gently, "he was involved in an embezzlement case, disappeared, died in the Midwest about four months ago."

Her fingers were twined tightly before her. "That was an awful time. Then two years ago Felice, she's my aunt, my father's sister, was accused of being a hit-and-run driver. Shortly after that Egbert, my brother, got in a drunken brawl and was almost killed. Now—this—my father's death," her face twisted bitterly, "to put us on the front page of every paper in the state."

She came toward Murder, stood close to him. "I've told you this," she said desperately, "because it's common knowledge anyway and to remind you of what I've been through. We can't have a lot of publicity again. My husband is a big man in this state. Lowell Ramsey is going to be the next governor—if we can keep the Testerman name out of headlines. So please, Mr. Murder, come back sometime when circumstances will allow us to become pleasantly acquainted."

Murder eyed her closely, his blue eyes sympathetic, a plea for justice on his beguiling kisser. "But, Mrs. Ramsey, it's my duty, my honor-bound duty—"

The door had opened silently. Now from the open doorway a heavy voice broke in on Murder's little speech. "Get out! You heard her!"

He was not a nice man to look at. He was built low and thick. His hands hung loosely, huge chunks of tough flesh and bone. He had a large, thick-skinned face that looked greasy. His nose and ears were overgrown, his teeth widely spaced. His big feet brought him lumberingly into the room like an elephant. And about him was something repulsive, like a disease.

Murder said placidly, "How do you do?"

The man came up close to the chief. "Get out!"

"Really," Abner Murder said, "let's be civilized. I simply wanted to talk with Mrs. Ramsey. Since you overheard us, you know we are private detectives. We have nothing to gain except the gratification of seeing justice done."

A slow, sardonic smile spread over the big man's kisser.

Lettie Ramsey tried to restrain him, but she only had time to say, "Please, Cousin Herschel—" when he bellowed:

"Who do you thing you're kidding, Murder? You give us a prima donna speech, while all the time you're licking your chops and trying to scent out a fat fee." He took a step toward the chief.

Abner Murder frowned, a deceptively foolish, startled look on his face. Easily, he took two steps away from Cousin Herschel, putting the cousin in the awkward position of having a dick on each flank. We were all set to paste Cousin Herschel one but we were denied that pleasure.

Someone upstairs screamed.

CHAPTER II

IT WAS a high-pitched scream, freezing the cousin and Lettie Ramsey. I shuddered at the frantic note in the scream, followed as the chief scrammed into the hallway. Cousin Herschel, coming to life, lunged and caught the chief by the coat tail.

"Hit him, Luke!" Murder whirled, ducking under the cousin's fist.

I planted one on the side of the big man's head. We were laying ourselves open to plenty of charges, throwing a party like this in a stranger's house, but charges were nothing new to us.

Herschel weaved at the knees, trying to spin on me and hang on to Murder at the same time. I hit him again, and the chief shook himself loose. Cousin Herschel sagged, fell, and Lettie Ramsey tried to scream; it came out a choked gasp. She was bending over the big man as the chief and I pounded up the stairs.

The scream poured down the hallway on us. I caught up with Murder just as he flung a door open. I took a look. Mayhem was being done.

I guessed we were in a bedroom. There was a large, old-fashioned oak bed in it, but its presence was somehow hidden in my swift glimpse of book cases, books strewn about the floor, half a dozen shelves of model airplanes, and a row of glass aquariums that stood along one wall.

We rushed into the room, my eyes flickering from one to the other of the three people who were here. There was an elderly man with a sensitive face, silvery hair, and a white Van Dyke lying on the floor midway between the door and the bed. A slim, narrow-shouldered man, his back to us, had cornered a screaming woman in the space between the bed and wall. In his hand was a heavy metal lamp.

The woman screamed again. She was a bleached blonde, beginning to spread about the edges, her face white under its load of cosmetics.

Then Murder and I were upon the man holding the lamp. I was all set to do a little more fist flinging. The man whirled, tilting back under our charge, and I felt ashamed. He was only a kid, his arms like broomsticks in my hands.

"Whoa, pal," the chief said.

THE slim man writhed. Murder sighed, jerked the lamp from his hand, and an abrupt change came over the kid. He drew himself up haughtily. I saw now that my first impression had been slightly mistaken. He did have the lean, slim face of an adolescent, the bony arms of a boy; but looking closely, I could see lines about his mouth and eyes that didn't belong to a young boy.

"You'll pay for your high-handed action!" he said melodramatically.

"Sure, sure," the chief grinned.

The womar against the wall was now sobbing softly. "Oh, Egbert! To think that you would threaten *me* of all people! Felice—your dear aunt!"

Egbert looked from Murder to Felice and said, "Nuts."

"Look to the gent on the floor, Luke," Murder said. As I turned, he shoved Egbert to a sitting position on the bed.

As I kneeled over the elderly man with the white van dyke, my gaze on the ugly bruise on his temple, he groaned weakly. His eyes fluttered and I helped him to his feet. He sagged against me for support.

Then, his senses clearing, he stiffened. "Egbert!"

"He's quite all right now, Doctor Conway," Murder said.

"You know me?"

The chief nodded. "You're Doctor Alex Conway. You're wealthy, have a daughter in a smart finishing school, have been in attendance to Egbert for about six years, and were almost thrown out of the Medical Association about a year ago for operating while slightly intoxicated." His grin was malicious. "Anything else you wish to know about yourself?"

Doctor Conway grinned wryly. "You get around."

"That's my business," Murder said. He glanced at Egbert Testerman; then let go of the kid. Felice still sobbed in tender self-pity, but as no male presence paid any attention, the sobbing gradually subsided.

The chief asked, "What was the trouble up here?"

I was watching Egbert. Common gossip, such as private shamuses pick

up, had it that Egbert was a medical puzzle. The doctors could not agree whether he was a genius or a blank-minded imbecile. He had an I. Q., I'd heard, that could bounce like a tennis ball—genius one day, moron the next. At the moment, he seemed sane enough, aloof enough from us to show he had some sort of complex, but still sane. Yet I remembered that first moment I saw him, the lamp in his hand. I stayed ready to pounce.

Doctor Conway stroked his beard and finally said, "I do not know you and am not aware of your business here. But the argument was simply between Egbert and Felice."

Miss Testerman perked up, eagerly grabbing the floor. "Tell him the truth, doctor! Tell him that Egbert had one of his spells!"

Egbert made a sneering noise in his throat; the chief clucked his tongue softly, was on the point of digging to the bottom of the argument, when the door opened and Lettie Ramsey and Cousin Herschel came in the room. The cousin was still a trifle groggy, but not too weak to step threateningly toward the chief. The big man was scowling. With that face of his, it was really something to look at—or away from.

Doctor Conway, staring at the cousin, said in sharp fright, "Here now! Herschel Briggs, you mustn't."

Lettie Ramsey, as if finally overwhelmed by it all, collapsed weakly in a chair. Felice whimpered and Egbert laughed.

I STEPPED forward to meet Herschel Briggs, but the chief stopped me. He said, "Mr. Briggs, as a gentleman, I beg you to sit down." The chief's fist was full of thirty-eight. Briggs drew up stiffly, backed, and sat down in a chair next to Lettie Ramsey.

The sudden silence in the room pounded in my ears. They stared foolishly at the gun in Murder's hand. It was the last play they'd expected a mild-faced guy to pull, I guess.

"Who the devil are you?" Egbert, rising slowly from the bed, asked.

"For the umpteenth time," Murder said wearily, "we're private dicks."

"Well," Egbert said generously, "why didn't you say so? I can tell you plenty! Osgood Macklin killed my father!"

"Mercy!" the chief said. "That's a broad statement!"

Felice Testerman came out of the corner, her face drawn. "He's lying! He doesn't know what he's saying! You can't believe Egbert. Everyone knows—"

"Don't say it!" He bounded to his feet, his fists clenched. "If you call me crazy one more time, I'll kill you!"

Doctor Conway came toward Egbert. "Come now. You mustn't agitate yourself."

"Keep away from me! Damn you, you might have killed him!"

Anger swelled the veins under the short white hairs on Conway's temples.

"Luke," the chief said, "pick up that chair. If another single one of them opens his yap without being spoken to, shut it for him."

"I getcha." I hefted the chair. Conway and Felice subsided.

"Now, Egbert," the chief said, "tell me about Macklin."

"You know him?" Egbert resumed his sitting position on the bed.

"Slightly," Murder said.

"You know, then, what a rotter Osgood Macklin is. He used to be one of those cheap crooks who carried a knife hooked on to his garter. He had a mob, a tough bunch of hoodlums. He made rot-gut liquor and sold it before prohibition.

"Then Osgood Macklin," Egbert went on, "got his fingers on a night spot uptown, the Sunnyside Club. He began doing a helluva big business and my old man didn't like it at all. You know that my father had the entertainment business just about cornered in these parts. He didn't like Macklin's competition and he put the squeeze on. Before he knew it,

Macklin was mortgaged to his ears.

"Then he met Felice, my father's own sister. He began playing her for all it was worth, hoping to save his own club and maybe take a couple of my old man's in the bargain.

"When a night club does up to fifty, sixty thousand dollars a year, it's big business, strong motive. And she," he sneered at Felice, "fell for his rotten line. She began to primp and try to be young again. She and my father had fights; they were a lot of fun to watch. She wanted my old man to pull the pressure off Macklin. She's nothing but a—"

With a short cry, Felice leaped forward and slapped him sharply across the mouth. Her blow brought small flecks of blood to Egbert's lips. As he recoiled, his eyes weren't nice.

Murder caught Felice by the wrist, pulled her away from Egbert, pushed her back into the corner. "So much for Macklin. He had motive, maybe he's got an alibi. But the rest of you—Mrs. Ramsey, what time did you learn your father was dead?"

She looked up slowly. "About five o'clock."

"They took his body straight to the morgue and questioned you?"

She nodded. "The police questioned all of us. We had just got back here a little over an hour before you and Mr. Jordan showed up."

"They told you where they found your father?"

"In some man's car. They said they were pretty sure, but were checking."

"And you all had alibis?"

SHE glanced about at them; there was a nervous shifting. Doctor Conway cleared his throat, "As a matter of fact, none of us could account for himself at the time of Reid's death. I was on my way here to see Egbert, Lettie—Mrs. Ramsey—was shopping, Mr. Briggs was in a pool room, Egbert was alone in his room, and Felice—"

"Well," she demanded, "why don't you say it! I was on my way to see Osgood Macklin."

"Did you see him?" I asked.

She bit her lip, said nothing. The chief chuckled, "Osgood was out buying cigars, Luke." He turned to Lettie Ramsey. "Your husband, Lowell Ramsey, gave up a law practice to become a state senator. Correct?"

She said that was correct.

"They're thinking of running him for governor. He is violently opposed to gambling, plans to clean up every place in the state. Since your father's clubs cater to a gambling clientele, wasn't there a rift?"

She made no reply.

"Who inherits, Mrs. Ramsey?"

"She does!" Felice said, pointing a shaking forefinger at her niece. "Lettie gets the money! She saw to it that I was cut out!"

"To hell with you!" Egbert said. "Lettie deserves the dough. I'm too cockeyed, and you're too blinded by Osgood Macklin's sweet nothings."

I thought Felice would start swinging on him again, but she remained still, her eyes smoldering.

Murder said, "Mrs. Ramsey, where is your husband? Seems that he would come here at a time like this."

There was a long crackling pause, then in a small voice she said, "I phoned the capital. He wasn't there."

Murder considered this, then he flew off on another tack. "Who owns Persian cats around here?"

"So you found the cat?" Egbert asked easily. Abner Murder nodded.

"Did you stab the cat?" the chief asked.

Egbert clasped his hands about his knees, leaning back a little. "Sure, I killed the cat. It belonged to Felice. She sent it up here, caused it to destroy a model plane," he indicated a bit of wreckage on the floor, "tear some pages out of a medical encyclopedia I was just starting to read, and to upset an aquarium of tadpoles."

He laughed softly, but unpleasantly. "Ask her why she sent the cat in here,

Mr. Murder. It was the one sensible cat I've ever seen. Ask her why it happened to destroy the same aquarium of tadpoles that Osgood Macklin showed so much interest in yesterday. Make her answer and your case is practically sewed up."

Felice shed her cloak of self pity, her heavy, diet-tortured body quivering with anger. "You dirty little liar!" She would have said more, but at that moment a servant opened the door. It was the towering, thin butler who'd let us in.

"Pardon, Mrs. Ramsey," he said, "but a gentleman is downstairs. A detective lieutenant or some such person."

My pulse began to gain tempo like the motor of a dive bomber roaring to the attack. The chief stiffened.

Then the butler, coming on in the room, caught sight of us. "You!" he gasped. "I told him you had gone!"

The room froze. Lettie Ramsey got to her feet, looking at the butler's pasty face. "What's wrong, Cortland?"

"The—the detective, Madam. He has solved—He—" Words failed him utterly, and he lifted a trembling hand, pointing at us.

"The detective is looking for Murder and Jordan for the slaying of your father!" He gulped, looked at the gun which was again in the chief's chubby hand and said, "Shall I scream, Madam?"

"If you want to die," the chief said.

CHAPTER III

IT WAS like being thrown in a den of lions. The sudden wave of bitter hostility, of murderous hate, engulfing us, sort of made my breath catch.

"I don't understand," Lettie Ramsey said.

"It's clear enough," Cousin Herschel sounded pompous. "These two bits of scum came here looking for what is known in their set as a fall guy."

With an admirable effort, the chief controlled himself. He looked at Mrs. Ramsey. "Felice, call downstairs to the detective. Tell him to come here."

She walked toward the door. Murder followed, planted himself against the wall so that the open door covered him, allowed him full sweep of the room with his gun. I knew what he was up to; I stayed in plain view.

Felice's voice was dry and quivering. "Policeman! Mrs. Ramsey is up here."

In a few moments we heard heavy footsteps coming down the hall, thudding dully in the carpet.

He was a cop I knew. A hulking, bald-headed guy named Tim Brogardus. He had his hat in his hand, a cigar in his thick-lipped mouth. He dropped the hat, almost swallowing the cigar, at the sight of me.

I was bathed in cold sweat, fearing that some of them would make a break and tip our hand. Brogardus dug for his gun, yelled, "Jordan!" and came charging into the room. He got as far as the doorway.

His gun ungently in Tim's ribs, the chief said, "Hiya, Tim."

Brogardus, with a slow, clean gesture, took his hand away from his shoulder rig. "You ain't gettin' away with nothin', Ab Murder!"

"Talk is cheap. March."

His lips tight, Tim walked to the center of the room.

"Get his handcuffs, Luke. We'll hook him to the tripod of that homemade telescope over there by the window. He can get away, but he'll have to take the whole shebang with him."

In two minutes he was trussed firmly to the telescope. We took leave of the charming Testermans, slammed the door behind us, and went down the stairs three at a time. Just as the front door banged behind us we heard a loud clatter—Brogardus and the telescope falling end over end down the stairs.

As we cut across the lawn, scurrying into the friendly cloak of night, the chief took it upon his precious self

to inform me, "Luke, I sort of think we're in a helluva big pot of boiling water . . ."

HALF an hour later, we were in a crowded drugstore. I sat at a table near the phone booths, sipping a malted milk and keeping an eye peeled on the front door. Murder came out of one of the booths, walked up to me, and said:

"Well, I'll be darned!"

"You located Lowell Ramsey?"

He snapped his fingers. "Just like that. I phoned the office of Ramsey's brother—the one that Ramsey gave his law firm to when he got in politics, just on an off-chance, it being so late. And Ramsey is in his brother's office right now."

"That's something. I been thinking we might have to tear the town apart to find Ramsey. You phone him that we were coming up?"

The chief nodded and we left the drugstore. At the hackstand on the corner, we got a cab.

The elevators had stopped. We had to walk ten flights before we turned down a corridor and came to a lighted door, the gold letters on which announced that this was the sanctum of *Ullman, Ullman & Ramsey, Attorneys at Law.*

The chief palmed the knob, opened the door. Ramsey was in the office directly behind this large, outer room. The connecting door was open, framing him and the massive walnut desk behind which he was sitting.

At the sound of the outer door opening, he rose, came forward to meet us. He was a small, neatly built man, dressed conservatively in dark blue worsted. His face was lean, almost hungry looking, suggestive of inner power, with a wide mouth and solid chin, a thin nose, and a forehead made abnormally high by receeding brown hair.

"Hello, Mr. Ramsey," the chief said. "Meet Mr. Jordan. I'm Abner Murder."

We shook hands. "I'm glad to meet you; but from your phone call—"

"Can we go in there?" Murder gestured toward the office from which Ramsey had come. "We're detectives. We want to talk to you about your father-in-law."

That jarred him. He said, "Come on in." We walked into the office, and Murder said:

"What time did you leave the capital?"

"Shortly before five o'clock."

"And what time did you get in town?"

"About two hours ago. Will you tell me—"

"Mercy! That's almost four hours driving. Quite some time to drive only ninety miles."

Ramsey walked around the desk and sat down. "I had a flat tire and had to change it myself. I—What the devil is this all about? Why—"

"One thing at a time. When you got in town, you came straight here?"

Ramsey nodded. "I still have a connection with this law firm. Occasionally I come here for an evening's work. I haven't been out of this office all evening."

"Then you don't know?"

"Know what?" he demanded angrily.

"Reid Testerman is dead—murdered," the chief said flatly.

Ramsey stared. He was trembling as he pulled a handkerchief from his breast pocket and ran it over his forehead.

"Reid . . . ? Testerman, dead . . . ?" His voice was a dry croak. In a whisper he added, "Murder—right in the family, now of all times!"

"You're scared of publicity?" the chief asked.

Ramsey looked up, his eyes a queer mixture of fright and bewilderment, maybe even hate. "It won't help my chances. Running for governor, you know. But—but they'll run Reid's killer to earth. And as long as I'm not involved directly—"

"Pardon," the chief said. "But that's the catch."

Ramsey made no reply, simply glancing from the chief to me, back to Abner Murder. His only outward show of emotion was a tightening of his knuckles, which were on his desk. And the glint that crept into his eyes. He was thinking fast.

MURDER leaned on the desk, his palms on the edge of it. "I'll explain. You are involved. You can't account for yourself for at least an hour's time. The chief failed to say that this was not the hour during which Testerman had been killed. But I knew what he was driving at. Anyway, suppose Ramsey was lying, that he had left the state capital earlier?

"You," the chief said, "have everything to gain—with Reid Testerman dead."

Ramsey broke in with a harsh laugh that contained worried undertones. "Gain? What will I gain?"

"An election and a fortune. It's a sure thing that Testerman would have fought your election; you talk too much of crusades against gambling. The fortune—well, that's yours indirectly, since Lettie Ramsey, your wife, inherits her father's entire fortune."

"Does she?" he said in a shocked voice. "Lettie—inherits? I didn't know that! I thought—What are you trying to do? Do you think I'd take a chance on killing a man when I'm—"

"I'm not thinking," the chief said. "I'm just showing you the facts. There's enough against you right now to slap you on the front page of every rag in the whole state. Don't you think the police and reporters will figure things as I have?"

Ramsey's face went livid; he leaned forward, gripping the edge of the desk. "Police! Then who the hell are you? You said you were detectives!"

"Easy, easy." Murder waved a placating hand, catching my attention out of the corner of his eyes so that I stood ready. "Sure, we're detectives, private detectives."

Ramsey relaxed, something like a sneer creeping over his clean-cut face. He said eloquently, "Oh," and reached for the telephone.

Murder beat him to it, clamping his hand over the ivory receiver like a snake striking. He jerked the phone as Ramsey pulled at it, and in jerking the instrument, the chief knocked a small beaten silver box from the desk. The box hit the carpet, the lid coming open, and Ramsey suddenly forgot the phone. He dived at the box, giving no thought to dignity.

I beat him to that. I sprang without thinking, my subconscious tipping me off that the box was evidently important. Ramsey smashed on my back as I bent over the box. Swarming over me, he struck me a stinging blow on the cheek, gasping and cursing.

"Give me that! Damn you, take your hands—" Then his weight evaporated from my heaving back and I straightened up. The chief had pushed Ramsey into a chair, and Ramsey, his eyes wild, sat glaring at Murder's gun.

"We dislike violence," the chief explained. "But you can bet your bottom dollar that I know how to use this gun. Please sit quietly."

I dumped the contents of the box on Ramsey's desk. His evident eagerness to keep us away from the box made even less sense, for it contained, simply, a matching pen and pencil, a glossy photo, and something wrapped in a handkerchief. Carefully, I pulled the folds of the handkerchief back. It was a silver cigarette case.

Frowning, I glanced at Ramsey, and the frown grew deeper. He was watching that box like a condemned man looking at the gallows.

"I don't get it," I said.

But Murder made something of it. Picking up the glossy photograph, he whistled softly. "Take a look, Luke."

It was the head-and-shoulders photograph of a young man. He seemed to be of average height and build, perhaps slim. His face was

finely featured, narrow, with a slim straight nose, clear skin, sparkling teeth flashing in a smile. But it still didn't mean a thing to me.

Murder saw the blank look on my face. "That," he said, "is Lettie Ramsey's first husband. Kneale Rivers."

CHAPTER IV

RAMSEY moaned faintly. I shook my head. "Nothing jells. I didn't know this Kneale Rivers while he was alive, have never seen him."

Murder smiled wisely. "Where'd the box come from?" he asked Ramsey.

Wilted, Ramsey sat behind the desk and said nothing.

"You might as well give out," Murder said. "I can guess most of it. Your wife is still in love with her first husband, who is dead—this Kneale Rivers—and a ghost is breaking up your marriage."

"No," Ramsey said hoarsely, "that isn't true. I—I might as well tell you. You'll guess and your answers will be worse than the truth.

"You know the story. Five years ago Kneale Rivers embezzled a lot of money from the brokerage firm he worked for. He disappeared, leaving no trace. It did horrible things to Lettie. We wanted to marry. Then four months ago there was an accident out in Nebraska. A fast train hit an automobile, smashed it, and the car burned. They found Kneale Rivers' charred remains twisted up under the dashboard."

He paused, moistening his lips with his tongue. "They identified Rivers by the fingerprints on the wheel, compared with those taken at the time of the embezzlement, five years back. They shipped what was left of him back here, Lettie buried him. In spite of what people might have said, we were married right away. People didn't really blame her for not waiting the customary year though, knowing how Kneale Rivers had—"

"I'm not interested in people," Murder said. "Tell me about the box."

Ramsey looked obliquely at the box, drew in shuddering breath. "I've seen the box a time or two. In the back of Lettie's chest. But I didn't know what it contained. Then tonight when I came here, it was on the desk."

"You sure as hell need us, Mr. Ramsey," the chief said. "Think of the motive they'll pin on you now. No possible defeat in the election, Testerman's money in the hands of your wife, and from the contents of the box they'll gather that Testerman, hoping to harm you, had deliberately kept alive the memory of her first husband in your wife's mind."

Perspiration made Ramsey's forehead look as if it was covered with a film of cellophane. He swallowed with an effort.

Murder relentlessly pressed his point. "It will be a wonderful feature story—the story of a weird triangle, with a ghost a suitor, ending in murder."

"Stop it! Damn you, stop it!" He was almost writhing in his chair. "What can I do?"

"Well," the chief said, "Luke and I might help."

"Is that why you came here," Ramsey said suspiciously, "to get a fee?"

The chief laughed easily. "I always look for work, yes. But I really came here to warn you. I have presented the case as the police will see it. You have no choice—Luke and I are your last hope."

The perspiration was now huge globs on Ramsey's forehead. "How much?"

"Five grand," the chief said.

Ramsey hesitated and Murder jerked his head at me. "Come on, Luke."

"No, wait! I—I guess you're right. I am in a spot." He had jumped to his feet, stood straining against the desk. "I'll give you a check."

He dropped back in his chair. Murder's eyes were big as Ramsey wrote the check.

"You will notice," Ramsey said,

"that I have dated the check two days hence. You can't cash it until then. If you haven't run the killer to earth in that time, I'll stop payment."

That was a rude blow that darkened Murder's face, but he made no kick. He said, "There'll be no need to stop payment, Mr. Ramsey. Good night." We left the office, Ramsey standing behind the desk, his face drawn, his shoulders sagging. I wondered if he was praying or cursing.

MR. OSGOOD MACKLIN was a thin, tall gentleman with a narrow face, a gash of a mouth, and eyes like two drops of black ink. He started to slam the door of his apartment shut in our faces, but Murder said:

"Tadpoles."

"You nuts?" Macklin wheezed, his words thick. He sniffed audibly.

"That's a moot question," Murder grinned. "But it seems that tadpoles and Testerman's death, which you have probably been reading about in the papers by this time, are tied together. And you are linked with the baby frogs."

"Me?" He took a handkerchief from the pocket of his robe and held it against his nose, sneezing.

"I'll explain, if Luke and I can come in."

"Tadpoles, Reid Testerman, and, huh?" He swung the door wide.

The living room was crowded with modernistic furniture, a deep yellow rug on the floor, the walls being an exhibit of modern art, mostly in the nude.

Macklin walked over to a big square chair and sat down. "What tadpoles?"

"Egbert's" the chief said.

"I don't know nothing. I been in this apartment all day."

"Oh, hell, Macklin, I'm not trying to give you a third degree. I just want to know why you were so interested in Egbert's tadpoles."

Macklin shifted in his chair, his handkerchief to his nose. "I got an awful head cold. I feel terrible. And here you come, a private shamus I sort of like, yapping about tadpoles. And Reid Testerman. I knew I'd get in hot water messing with that screwball."

"Screwball?"

"That Testerman dame! Felice Testerman. Better I should lose the Sunnyside Club," he said mournfully, "than to get tangled in a killing."

Without invitation, Murder sat down near Macklin. "You could have killed Reid Testerman, you know."

"I told you I been here all day," Macklin said harshly.

"What was in that tadpole bowl?" the chief prodded.

"I don't know nothing! Now get out of here! I think I don't like you guys so well after all."

The chief glanced covertly at me, slapping his fist in his palm. Macklin caught the gesture and said, "So now you're going to rough me up, huh? Make me talk!"

He didn't change position, but before Murder or I could wiggle a muscle, a gun was in Osgood's hand, out of his robe pocket.

"Now, you flatfeet, stand still and let me tell you something. I don't know nothing about Testerman's killing. I just fished a fountain pen out of that tadpole bowl. I been here all day and can prove it. And you lugs are getting out—"

Murder threw the lamp with a quick overhand motion, scooping it from the table near him and throwing in one gesture. Macklin's gun blasted. A bullet hummed by my cheek, plowing into the plaster behind me. The roar of the gun, the shattering of the lamp blended with a smell of gunpowder and the feel of my shoulders crashing into Osgood as he jumped from the chair.

The gun thundered again, then Macklin cried out as the chief wrung the weapon from his fingers. I tripped the slim man. Macklin's breath wheezed out as we crashed to the floor. I drew back to give him the punch that would make him have

nightmares. And the door across the room burst open.

Even later I wasn't sure how many of them there were. The chief thought there were six. They had been in Macklin's bedroom all the time. Now they burst out, swarming over us.

I HEARD Murder cursing. I was trying to get to my feet when two of them crashed into me from opposite sides. One of them, while my arms were flailing, clipped me on the back of my skull with an automatic. I squeezed my eyes shut, watching the sparks, opened my mouth against the pain, and whooshed into blackness.

I regained consciousness swinging. Somebody said, "Easy, Luke!"

I relaxed, opening my eyes. I seemed to be in a canyon. In the narrow strip of night overhead was a band of stars like a diamond bracelet. A sour odor bit at my nostrils. I put out my palms, felt cinders. We were in an alley.

Murder helped me to my feet. "Head ache, Luke?" he chuckled.

"Damn near as bad as yours!" I said shortly.

I stood swaying, holding my head with both hands. I had a lump on the back of my head that made my skull feel elongated. "What happened?"

"What do you think happened? We fought manfully against great odds. Honest, sincere champions of justice receiving treatment—"

"Can it," I said, "I'm not a client."

"Can you walk okay?"

"I think so. Where are we?"

"I don't know. Probably several blocks from Macklin's place. He wouldn't dump us close around. Let's take a look."

It was asking too much; it was tempting fate too strongly; but we walked blithely out of the alley, got a cab and went to the office.

The place had a nameless chill hanging over it. A light across the street kept flashing on and off, making shadows play about crazily.

Murder pulled the blinds and clicked on a desk lamp. "This is the last place the cops will think of looking for us, Luke. Relax. Anyway, since Macklin confiscated our guns we had to come back here or prowl weaponless."

He went behind the studio screen and I could hear water running. I pulled one of my desk drawers open. The first slug was so fine I took another one. I eyed the bottle. Then I slipped it in my back pocket. We'd probably need it.

It was while I was patting water on my pulsating skull that the phone rang. I almost jumped out of my shoes. I heard the receiver click. I cursed Murder for answering it.

He mumbled a moment, then slammed the receiver down. "That was Doctor Conway, Luke! Get a move on. We're going to palaver with him."

"But I'm all wet—"

"In more ways than one. But never mind that." I heard him jerk the door open, and I was still dripping water from my face, hair, and hands when I caught up with him in the corridor.

ON THE WAY to Conway's house, I learned that he had begged us to hurry down and had hung up abruptly. It was the sort of bait that always drove the chief frantic.

A gaunt housekeeper, blinking when she heard the chief's monicker, led us into the huge depths of his rambling old house; she paused before a door and said:

"The doctor is in there. Go right in."

Murder turned the knob as the housekeeper faded down the hall. Conway was waiting for us behind his desk. There'd been no need to hurry. He would have waited a long time. Conway was dead.

Murder closed the door quickly and we went toward the desk. Conway stared straight at us, his mouth hanging open over his Van Dyke, and I shivered. He'd been strangled with a silk hose. His fingers were still frantically embedded in it.

As Murder moved up close to the

desk, I glanced about the room. It was a study of sorts, with a huge mahogany book case against the north wall. A large French door opened on the eastward expanse of dark lawn.

"Nasty," the chief said.

"Find anything?"

"Someone has already been here." He indicated two open desk drawers. From one of the drawers, he picked up a slip of paper.

"What's that?"

"Just a note from Reid Testerman to Conway asking the doctor to come to his house for bridge. Must have been stuck way back in the drawer, dated three years ago."

I was conscious of the tick of my watch; the hush in which the house was suspended. In Conway's face I was seeing the same thing I had seen in Testerman's, the spasm of death from strangulation. I was thinking that one corpse had already been found in my car. If we were caught here with another . . .

"Luke," Murder said softly, "the killer must be close around."

My eyes jerked to the darkness beyond the French door. "How—how do you know?"

"We scared him off. He heard us, left, and let two of the desk drawers remain open. Catch? All the drawers are closed but two, yet all of them have been searched." He reached for the doctor's black medical bag at the same moment I doused the light. The room plunged in darkness, I heard him searching the bag.

He said, "I've found it, Luke."

He thrust something forward. I touched it. It was the same beaten silver box that had been in Lowell Ramsey's office.

"You mean Conway was killed for this?"

"Because of the cigarette case inside it."

"Are you trying to kid me?"

"Luke," he whispered intensely, "I was never more serious in my life. Because of the cigarette case inside this box, Doctor Alex Conway was murdered!" Screwy as it was, I believed him.

I opened my mouth to ask him who had wanted the box; but the words never left my lips. Someone outside started shooting.

CHAPTER V

WE HIT the carpet together. Half a dozen thunderous heartbeats and a second shot crashed through the French door. I drew a breath; we were safely hidden in the dark interior of the room from the person outside. And if he came in here, we had the two twenty-five automatics we'd picked up in the office.

Then I became aware of another sound, screams in the hallway, and I knew the housekeeper had been screaming in terror from the moment the first shot was fired. The scream headed out the front, reached the sidewalk. Any moment a harness bull would come on the double.

"Take your pick, Sherlock," Murder said. "The front door and the cops, or the French door and the murderer."

A heavy shout came in answer to the screams.

"The French door," I said.

The moon was partially obscured by clouds. There were a few tendrils of fog. We inched along, a fourth of the way across the lawn. The housekeeper was silent now. That meant the cop, too, was somewhere on the lawn. Four of us—myself, Murder, the killer, and the cop all stalking each other. And the lawn was heavily dotted with shrubs, plenty of places for death to be lurking.

Then the cop, moving in the shadows of a box hedge, started the fireworks. He stepped on a twig.

Two quick shots rang out from the shelter of a small cedar tree. Another flash of crimson came as the murderer fired from a position ten feet from the tree. He was weaving and dodging.

There was a scrambling at the hedge and the cop's service revolver roared throatily. All in the space of a

single instant, yet eternities seemed to drag between each shot.

Silence crashed down again. I wished I had a nice foxhole with a steel cover.

Then a siren began to scream in the distance, and light, swift footsteps, someone running on tiptoe, padded faintly on the lawn. They were thirty feet from us, going toward the back corner of the house. Murder and I lay as still as wooden Indians. The cop's heavy gun roared twice.

The heavier footsteps of the cop followed as a hunched shadow rounded the corner of the house. In a moment there was a clatter, a sharp course. The cop had run over a garbage can. The way to the sidewalk was clear. The chief and I needed no second invitation.

"We didn't even get a look at him," I whispered bitterly, as we ran softly along the box hedge. "We don't know who he is!"

Murder laughed grimly. "Don't we?"

THERE were six people in the spacious library of the Testerman home when Murder, his gun in the back of the butler, made the butler open the door. Crackling silence, then a rippling gasp, as we walked into the room. I glanced from one to the other of them, Lettie and Lowell Ramsey, Egbert Testerman, horse-faced Herschel Briggs, Osgood Macklin, and Felice Testerman.

"He forced me, Madam," the butler explained through cracked lips. "The little one has a gun and the big one hit me when I tried to throw them out, as you ordered."

Lettie Ramsey had risen from a large, leather-upholstered chair. "I'm sure Mr. Murder will explain himself."

Osgood Macklin watched with veiled eyes, sniffling; Cousin Herschel set his teeth and glared; Lowell Ramsey was white and shaken.

Felice opened her mouth, all set to put a fine tone of self pity in her voice, but Egbert, relishing the tableau, said, "There's only one reason Mr. Murder could have for coming back. He's going to put the finger on the killer."

Abner Murder let us hang, grinning hugely. He really lived at moments like this. Then he said, "There is a basic confusion we must clear up before we can understand things. We have thought, Luke, that we were hunting a double murderer, the killer of Reid Testerman and Doctor Alex Conway. But we were actually hunting a person who had killed three times. Reid Testerman was his second victim, Doctor Conway his third."

He rubbed the end of his nose with his gunsight. "The first murder was done way off. In Nebraska, to be exact."

"You mean," I said, "that the same person who killed Testerman and Conway also killed Mrs. Ramsey's first husband, Kneale Rivers?"

Ignoring me blithely, he turned to Mrs. Ramsey. "It's been difficult, hasn't it? Even nightmarish. One day you were a happily married woman, the next day you woke to find that you had not one husband but were doubly blessed. You had two husbands! You were a bigamist!"

Her mouth twisted. "That's a lie!"

Lowell Ramsey stepped forward, pushed his wife behind him. "Gun or no gun, Mr. Murder, you can't blithely accuse my wife of murder!"

"I'm not accusing her!" the chief said shortly. "Cut the heroics or I'll bean you one."

"Well," Egbert said, leaning loosely against the mantel over the yawning fireplace, "who is the murderer?"

The chief chuckled, then he put on his most serious manner. "A ghost," he said gravely, "a ghost killed Reid Testerman and Alex Conway."

Felice whimpered. "That's not a nice joke!"

"He's off his nut," Osgood Macklin said sourly.

"If we all rushed him," Cousin Herschel said, "we could throw him out."

I pulled my gun, but there were no takers to the cousin's offer.

"Let's turn back the clock," Murder said, "to five years ago. Lettie Ramsey was then Lettie Rivers. Her husband, Kneale River , embezzled a small fortune and disappeared. He vanished utterly and no trace of him was found until his death was reported several months ago. Lettie buried him and quite promptly married her present spouse, Mr. Ramsey, a man to whom the faintest breath of scandal would be fatal.

"It was a wonderful scheme! Kneale Rivers went away from here knowing something about himself that no other mortal knew After he vanished, he kept track of the old home town, knew every move his wife made. He found out she was in love with Ramsey, knew that she would marry him if given the chance; also he knew that scandal would ruin Ramsey, and he knew this strange fact about himself, which I'll get to in a moment.

"So he started his amazing scheme in motion. He found a tramp, planted him in his car, and planted the car on the railroad tracks. When the boys at headquarters are through third-degreeing, they'll know who was really in that car."

LOWELL Ramsey said, "How do you know it wasn't Rivers?"

"You gave me the first tip. You told me how Rivers was identified, his fingerprints on the steering wheel checked against those of five years back. That meant the prints had been burned off the fingers, or it wouldn't have been necessary to have checked those on the wheel. Which in turn meant that Rivers himself, alive and satisfied, had been in the crowd that

gathered about the car, and when it cooled, put his own prints on the wheel. In the excitement, his action went unnoticed. It's simple—if there'd been enough heat to have burned the prints from the fingers, prints would have been burned from the wheel also. And that, of course, meant that the prints had been put on the wheel after the accident.

"Back to Rivers—the charred remains of his first victim were buried by Lettie, and she then promptly fulfilled Rivers' expectations completely—by marrying Lowell Ramsey.

"His next step, now that his wife is married to a man to whom scandal would be fatal, is to murder Reid Testerman. Thus Lettie inherits a couple of million dollars. As soon as Rivers reveals himself, reveals that she is a bigamist he knew she'd pay plenty to keep him quiet. What gory headlines the whole business would have made! It would have ruined Ramsey, as Rivers knew, and Lettie would be perfectly willing to protect her husband.

"Reid Testerman came to us suspecting something, afraid to go to the police, because that would have meant exposure of the very fact his daughter wanted kept silent at all costs—the scandal of her being a bigamist. Conway recognized Rivers and was killed for that reason. He was a good friend of Testerman's; an invitation to play bridge in his desk proves that, and refrained from calling the police to avoid scandal."

"Chief," I said squeamishly, "you're telling me that Kneale Rivers is the man we're looking for, that he's still alive."

Lowell Ramsey, his face drawn, looked at his wife. "Why didn't you tell me, Lettie? Why—"

"Because she loved you too much. She was trying to protect you, as Rivers was banking on her doing."

"But Rivers, chief we've never even seen him!"

"Haven't we? I'm looking at him right now." Murder fixed his gaze on Cousin Herschel Briggs.

In the midst of the tight hush Osgood Macklin sneezed; Felice moaned. Then Cousin Herschel threw back his head and laughed uproariously. "That's a hot one! Me—Kneale Rivers! You've seen a photograph of him; you know that he was slim, clean-cut, clear-skinned, even teeth closely spaced. No make-up man or surgeon in the world could change Rivers into what I am!"

I was inclined to agree, looking at the cousin's big body, his overgrown, unhealthy face, his huge nose, large ears, hands, and feet. His thick-looking greasy skin, his widely spaced teeth.

Murder, however, did not lose his smile. "You didn't need a make-up man, Herschel—Kneale Rivers. That was the strange fact you knew about yourself." The chief glanced at me. "How does Rivers strike you?"

"Frankly," I said, "as being—well, diseased."

"Hell, you're learning. His disease provided him with the finest disguise imaginable."

Sweat was beading Rivers' thick upper lip.

"IT GOES back to the cat," the chief said. "Egbert has a remarkably high I.Q., at times dabbling a bit in everything from astronomy to model planes. He killed the cat for destroying three things: a model, a few pages out of a medical encyclopedia, and an aquarium of tadpoles. The model and tadpoles were merely cover-up measures that Rivers took at the time he destroyed the pages out of the medical book, making it appear that the cat had wrought the destruction. He was afraid that Egbert would come across the symptoms of his disease and recognize him.

"Conway, being a doctor, actually did recognize Rivers. Egbert, the malicious little rat, planted the silver box containing Rivers' belongings in Ramsey's office. He hoped to stir up trouble,

as he has tried to do several times in our presence to have some sadistic fun.

"Lettie had forgotten the existence of the box, but Conway met Ramsey, who returned here as soon as we left his office. Doctor Conway learned of the box, its contents. He already suspected Briggs as really being Rivers. He got the box, checked the prints on the cigarette case, was positive of his recognition. The case was the cause of his death, for he had to be silenced."

The chief hefted his gun at Rivers. "You're a pretty smart guy, even using a silk stocking as your murder weapon. You're a man of direct action, and you knew the hose might slyly point to someone with a mental make-up such as Egbert has. You didn't miss a trick. Except that you didn't have time to find the silver box at Conway's. Containing Rivers' belongings it could be significant in only one way—someone didn't want to be reminded of Rivers."

Murder said to me, "For a long time, Luke, I've been telling you that a good private dick knows a little something about everything. This proves it and you can take the lesson to heart. Remember that Egbert said he was just beginning to read the medical encyclopedia. That meant he was in the section beginning with the letter A. Since the book was destroyed so hurriedly, it followed that someone—Rivers—feared something in the A section. With all the facts, I knew that Rivers had Acromegaly.

"It's a disease of the pituitary gland, not so terribly rare. The gland works overtime. The ears, nose, hands, and feet of a person become enlarged. The teeth become separated, the skin thick, coarse, and greasy.

"Rivers had the disease five years ago. Now, on his return, his whole appearance has changed. Given the key, you can see that his appearance is actually symptomatic of the disease, just as the symptoms of pernicious anemia, for example, and dozens of other diseases are reflected in a person's appearance."

Murder took a step toward Rivers. "How do you feel now, cousin? Your face has changed, but not your fingerprints. You—"

Rivers hurled himself to his feet, his hand digging frantically for a gun. I shot him through the shoulder.

Felice screamed; Egbert laughed; Osgood Macklin sat coolly and sneezed. The chief turned to Lowell and Lettie Ramsey. They were clinging to each other.

"It's better this way," Murder said softly. "Life wouldn't have been worth living with Rivers dogging every step of it. Even the governorship would have been a hollow, maddening achievement with him lurking like a shadow over the governor's mansion."

He smiled, his voice growing very gentle. "This way the slate is clean. You have each other; you can go away; and Lowell can have the fun of becoming some town's top lawyer."

Osgood Macklin shook with laughter. "Wait'll the boys hear of that pretty little speech!"

Murder cleared his throat uncomfortably, giving Osgood a glance which was very askance. "Call the bulls, Luke. Then call Jo-Ann. Tell her we're okay, but hungry. And—oh, by the way, Mr. Ramsey, will you change the date on this check you gave me?"

Lowell Ramsey's gaze was imprisoned with that of his wife. They were both smiling. The chief was still trying to get Ramsey's attention when I went into the hall to hunt for a phone.

Follow the Bony Finger

By Lee Kessler

A true crime story of a corpse that put the finger on its own slayer.

SHORTLY before sundown on August 21, 1940, Sheriff Glenn Bera of Barry County, Michigan, braked his car to a stop before the neat white farmhouse in which Calvin Wagner and his wife lived. As the sheriff and his deputy, Leon Doster, climbed from the machine, Wagner hailed them.

"Have you seen Mrs. Miller?" asked the sheriff. "Her brother called me. He said she was coming over here and she never returned."

Wagner tugged at the visor of his green-and-black-checkered cap. Mrs. Miller was the owner of the hundred-acre farm of which he was the caretaker. "She was here early," he stated. "But I haven't seen her since eight-thirty this morning. She went on a tour of inspection. I'd have gone with her, but I was unusually busy today. Besides she knows the farm pretty well, herself."

Bera and Doster exchanged glances. Mrs. Emma Travis Miller was a socially prominent resident of Kalamazoo. Leaving the farmer at the barn, they decided to take a look around. As they rounded a clump of trees near a swiftly flowing creek, the clanking of cow bells could be heard in the distance. The two men followed the winding creek bed and a few minutes later they saw the dairy herd contently grazing in a field across the little stream.

The men stopped and gazed for a minute, as they noticed it was newly seeded pasture land in which the cows were grazing. Then, too, could be seen signs where Wagner had been digging postholes, presumably for a fence to keep the cows out. It was night before the officers finally gave up the search and returned to the farmhouse. They had found no trace of the wealthy widow. She had disappeared.

On Thursday, August 22, a posse of more than a hundred peace officers combed the weeds and forests of the farm and surrounding wasteland in vain. There was no clue to the whereabouts of the missing woman. The search continued fruitlessly throughout the week.

A few days later Sheriff Bera received a phone call from the sheriff of the next county. "I just had a call from a John Scanlon, who was the caretaker of the farm for Mrs. Miller before Wagner. He said he just heard we were expecting to find Mrs. Miller dead rather than alive and volunteers his services. Claims he's more familiar with the farm buildings and surrounding countryside than any man alive and knows all the places where a body might be hidden. I'm bringing him out tomorrow."

The next day Under-sheriff Otto K. Buder and Deputy Sheriff John Dewitt appeared with Scanlon. Bera, Doster and Cal Wagner met them. Scanlon's first suggestion was a dried and filled-up well. He led the way around the house to the huge barn in the rear.

Borrowing a flashlight from Doster, the old farmer walked directly to one corner of the barn and lifted up the flooring. The officers crowded around the gaping cavity revealed. A

circle of flashlights stabbed at the hole and keen eyes probed the depths for any sign of the missing woman's body. Finally Sheriff Bera stepped back, his mouth a thin, straight line.

"She's not in there, boys. We'll have to keep searching."

The others turned toward him. "Still," the sheriff continued, "there's a chance she might be buried under here somewhere. At least it's one place we haven't looked. Have you a shovel we can use, Wagner?"

The farmer shook his head. "Sorry," he said apologetically, "haven't seen one around here since I took over the farm."

A SHORT while later Buder and his two companions left. At Scanlon's direction they parked the police car at the side of the road near the creek. "This is wild country," said the under-sheriff, "but we'll keep looking until we find the poor woman."

Deputy Dewitt halted suddenly and pointed to the ground at the edge of the grass. "Look here," he said, "the grass is crushed and the bushes broken as if someone dragged a heavy object along the ground." He crashed through the thin line of bushes and tumbled out of sight down the steep incline. "I've found her!" his companions heard him shout. "I've found Mrs. Miller!"

There lay Mrs. Miller in a crumpled heap, face downward in the weeds.

Apparently she had been beaten to death with some sharp-edged weapon, for her gray hair was matted with dried blood from deep gashes in her scalp. Her left arm was flung out at an awkward angle, as if broken. John Scanlon swallowed audibly. Dewitt eyed him sharply.

"You certainly did pick out the place," he commented dryly, "but this body wasn't here last week. Just what made you so sure it would be here now?"

The old farmer managed a weak smile. "Well, you see," he began. "I wasn't sure, but I had a dream." A shout from the road above interrupted him. "That sounds like Sheriff Bera," he said. "We'd better tell him."

The trio climbed back up the hill to where Bera and Doster awaited them. "It's written in your faces," said the sheriff, when told of their discovery. "Scanlon here seems to know all the hiding places."

The group was suddenly quiet. All eyes turned to the old farmer who had solved the mystery of the missing woman. His gnarled hands trembled, his eyes blinked, and he looked from one face to the next. "You don't think that—that I—had anything to do with it, do you?"

From around the bend in the road came the sound of a motor. In a moment Cal Wagner and his wife drove into view. Bera stepped out into the road, held up his arms. The car drew to a stop before him.

"We've found the body," he told Wagner, as the latter climbed out from behind the wheel. "I want you to look at her and make the formal identification, but I think Mrs. Wagner had best remain up here. It isn't a pretty sight."

Mrs. Miller's tenant followed Bera and Buder down the slope to the spot where the corpse of his landlady lay. He shuddered at the sight of her battered body and took off his hat, a new fedora. "That's her, all right," he affirmed. "I'd know her anywhere. And look! Her arm, it's almost as if she were pointing—" Wagner swallowed his words, choked. His eyes widened in terror, as he gasped for breath.

Sheriff Bera followed the man's frightened glance, then stepped forward and seized him by the shoulder. "Calvin Wagner," he said quietly, "I arrest you for the murder of Mrs. Emma Travis Miller!"

From the ground under the bushes Deputy Dewitt picked up a green-and-black-checkered cap. By a coincidence that seemed almost fictional, Mrs. Miller's outflung left arm had pointed di-

rectly to the bit of evidence which damned Calvin Wagner as a killer. Sheriff Bera shook his head grimly.

"I knew you were the killer when you said you had no shovel. The first evening I was here, I saw freshly dug postholes where you were about to erect a new fence. Yet you insisted you never had a shovel on the farm. There was only one answer, you had used it to bury Mrs. Miller!"

Calvin Wagner was taken to Barry County jail at Hastings and charged with murder. A medical examination of the corpse disclosed that skull fractures had brought about the unfortunate woman's death.

Confronted with the imposing mass of evidence, Wagner finally confessed.

"We were arguing about the cows getting into the newly seeded pasture-land," he said. "She said I deliberately let them in there. I told her no, I couldn't help it because of the old broken-down fences. She turned her back on me and started to walk down the road. She said, 'I'd rather deal with a thief than a liar, because you can watch a thief.' Then everything went black. I grabbed up a two-by-four that was lying on the ground and hit her again and again. Then I dragged her body into the barn basement and hid it in the well.

"I heard they were going to search the farm buildings the next day and I thought they might find the well, so I took the body out about midnight when everyone was asleep, brought it to the creek, and threw it in the bushes. I noticed my cap was missing, but I couldn't find it in the dark. I thought I could get it later during the day."

Buying on the Black Market helps the Enemy!

Observe the War Ration Laws and be a good soldier on the Home Front

A Slip in Crime

By Greta Bardet

When Detective Charles Weber slipped on the rug in the murder room, the thud of his fall was also the slam of the death house door for a murderer.

SHARP blasts of the winter wind cut like razors across Charles Weber's face, roared like thunder passed his ears. It tore like a demented thing at his coat, wildly flapped trousers against his long legs.

A shot rang out, close but muffled; Weber slid to a dead halt. Motionless,

all senses keenly alert, he tried to ascertain from which direction the shot had come. He peered through the dark deserted street. It was a moonless night; except for a smudge of light here and there, everything was inky shadows against a deep purple sky.

The sound was not repeated, and Charles began to wonder if perhaps he had been mistaken. Yet something told him he was not. He remained standing where he was for quite some time, until the icy wind seemed to blast itself right through to his bones. He began to walk again, slowly at first, then faster to start circulation against the cold.

From where had that shot been fired?

He continued up Placard Avenue until he came to the corner of Brand Street, there he turned and hurried on.

"What the hell! Probably a backfire." He walked several more streets. "But that sound *was* close, and there were no cars in sight."

Curiosity finally got the better of him; he turned back. He hurried back to Placard again. There he slowed his pace, carefully peering at every house on each side of the street as he passed.

Suddenly out of the blackness there came a click of footsteps and a slim soft body slammed against him with a choked cry of astonishment. Charles' arms shot out, trying to maintain his balance. His hands clutched air, he lost his footing, and fell flat on his back. The slim body came down with him.

There was a second during which the unknown body seemed to recover from the fall. There followed a high thin squeal, then a hand braced itself against Charles' chin, pushing away, trying to get on its feet. Weber reached out with powerful arms, opened them. He swept them around and found himself encircling an incredibly tiny waist.

"Just a minute!" he said, and was instantly the recipient of a storm of things. Fists beat against his face, and pumped him on the chest, while legs kicked frantically. And through the frightened squeals from what was evidently a woman in his arms, he heard the banshee wail of a police siren.

The female heard it too, for she froze, holding her breath to listen. "Oooh," she gasped a moment later. "It's the cops! Lemme go! Lemme go!"

Charles Weber did no such thing for two reasons. First, he was also a member of the body of law enforcement, and second, he liked it this way. She wore a nice brand of perfume. It made his duty a pleasure.

It was obvious she was not of the same mind, for she kicked again, squealed with suppressed passion. Her fists though they did no more damage than a slightly enraged mosquito, did sting.

The police siren was closing in. He told her to behave herself.

"Please, please let me go," she pleaded in desperation. "It's the police! They'll catch me!"

"They already have. The arms of the law are around you. What did you do?"

"Mr. Sterling called the police."

Just then the patrol car careened around the corner. Charles packed his hand about the woman's arm, scrambled to his feet, and managed to pull her up and hold her with one hand in spite of her frantic yanks.

WITH a screech of brakes, the patrol car came to a halt; the patrolmen jumped out. One of them flashed his light in Charles' face.

"Oh, it's you Weber," said Casey, and flashed the light over the girl. "Friend or foe?"

"Not sure. Found her running out of this house. What's up?"

"Received a call from Gregory Sterling. Robbery. He's been shot." He started after Hinkle, who was entering the house, but turned back to say, "We're to be on the lookout for a masked, armed gunman."

"I didn't do it!" cried the female and started to fight in earnest. "I didn't!"

"Oh shut up!" Charles said softly and followed the two uniformed men up the flagstone path. The woman did not care to return to the house, but Weber pulled. A glow of light from the house lit up her features. Charles saw a heart-shaped face; a black fedora hat crushed and askew, was pulled low over red hair.

"Who are you?" he asked as they entered the house.

"I'm Jerry Seery," she answered somewhat sullenly. "I'm Mr. Sterling's secretary. All I did was come for the packages Mrs. Sterling wants me to mail in the morning. I came in the house to find Mr. Sterling screaming over the telephone that a robber had shot him. I ran, that's all."

"Why did you run?"

"Why?" She gave him the full impact of a pair of wide-set grey-green eyes, which branded him a moron. "Why? Goodness sakes, how should I know? I just did, that's all."

She might just as well have said "because," and saved all that breath, Weber reasoned to himself.

Casey and Hinkle were in the foyer, standing over a man. He lay sprawled on his back near the telephone table, the receiver still clutched in his fist. He was unconscious. His face was chalk white. From his parted mouth came heavy breathing. His pajamas and bathrobe were bright with blood. Drops of blood led from the table up the stairs. There were smudges of blood on the wall paper. Gregory Sterling had been shot upstairs and had come down here to the telephone.

"Is he dead?" Jerry Seery squeaked like a mouse at Charles' side.

"No," Weber answered. "Can't you see he's breathing?"

"Oh I'm not looking at him," she told him. And she wasn't, she had her eyes squeezed shut.

"Guilty conscience, huh?"

Her eyes snapped open. "How dare you" was written on her face, but she was too frightened to say it.

Through an alcove, Charles could see into a spacious living room. As he turned to lead Jerry to this room, her mouth fell, her eyes went wide with consternation.

"Oh, my goodness, where's Mrs. Sterling? Where's—!" Her eyes went to the top of the stairs.

Charles was on the stairs, his long legs taking them three at a time. Jerry stumped after him at the more conventional one step at a time.

At the top of the stairs he followed the irregular drips of blood down the hallway. The blood stains ended before a closed door. "What room is this?" he asked her.

"I don't know," she answered. "I've never been up here before."

He knocked on the door, calling out to Mrs. Sterling. When he received no answer, he turned the knob. Throwing the door open, he took two steps into the room.

A moment later he jigged, teetered, his legs seemed to be treading air. His arms flung out, tried to reach out to stay his balance. Then, with a dull thud that seemed to mash his teeth to the gums, he was sitting on the floor. Jerry with her hat over one eye, lay right across his knees.

"What's the big idea, pushing me like this!" he growled, his eyes ablaze.

She slapped her hat from her eyes, her chin was belligerent. "What's the matter with your mother?" she blazed back at him. "Didn't she teach you how to walk?"

A little shamefacedly, he realized that his feet were wound up in a scatter rug, that he had slipped on the highly polished floor.

He got to his feet, helped Jerry to hers, while she muttered darkly under her breath. He was about to make apologies, when the words gagged in his mouth. He saw Mrs. Sterling from where he was standing. She was dead. She lay in a heap before the vanity about twenty feet from them. The

mirror of which reflected him with Jerry, wide-eyed and frightened, close beside him.

CAUTIONING Jerry not to move a step further into the room, he strode slowly over to the body of Mrs. Sterling. She lay, a crumpled, lifeless heap before the vanity. She had evidently toppled face forward from the vanity bench. Her head, twisted to the left lay on the bottom shelf of the vanity.

She was clad in a negligee. There was a bullet hole in the back of her head. A long finger of blood had traced a line down her spine.

Her right cheek and chin were covered with an oily green substance—a beauty clay. The jar from which she had taken the preparation was on the top of her vanity. Her right hand lay twisted back, a scoop of the clay still in her fingers.

Charles bent over to examine the wound. No powder burns. He straightened, turned to look about the room. On a table near the bed were four packages, neatly addressed, and wrapped in brown paper.

Jerry still standing obediently near the door, ventured an almost inaudible, "Is she . . .?" She swallowed, unable to continue.

Detective Charles Weber nodded grimly.

On the floor by the twin beds was another patch of bloodstains. That was probably where Gregory Sterling had been shot, for the trail of blood that led all the way down to the telephone table, began here. So if, Gregory Sterling had been shot here, he had made his way from this room, along the hall, and down the stairs to the telephone.

Then Charles saw the safe. A small wall safe between the beds. The door was open. He went over to it. "You know the combination to this safe?" he asked Jerry Seery.

"Oh, yes," she answered. "Mr. Sterling keeps it in his office safe. I have to know it in case he forgets it or something happens. But you don't need the combination," she pointed out, "the safe is open."

"Bright little girl," he said sarcastically, as he bent down and looked into the safe. "Empty. Know what they kept in it?"

"No, I don't."

Casey pushed his head in around the door, telling them that the ambulance surgeon had brought Mr. Sterling around.

"Mr. Stoiling," said Casey, "can describe his assailant for us."

"Oh?" said Jerry in a tiny voice.

They went downstairs. Detective Weber dumped the packages from the bedroom on the long mahogany table in the living room. Sterling was on the settee. His handsome face was drawn and pale; his shoulder was bandaged.

He handed a paper cup back to the interne. Settling back, he winced with pain. He was tall, a good-looking man in his forties. His hair was attractively peppered with silver, his nose long and well-shaped. It all tended to give him an air of refinement.

HE SPOKE with an effort. "My wife and I were just making ourselves comfortable for the evening, waiting for Miss Seery. I was standing near the bed, my wife was at the vanity doing things to her face, when the doorbell rang.

"Thinking it was Miss Seery, I opened the bedroom window, called down that I had left the door open for her. I couldn't make out who was standing at the door, since it was pitch black out there. I didn't wait for an answer, it was too cold. I shut the window.

"I then went over to the bed for my dressing gown, put it on, then—all at once, it happened. The bedroom door opened and I saw this—this—person standing there." He smiled apologetically over at Jerry.

"At first I thought it was you Miss Seery; it was dark in the room. My wife had the light over the vanity.

There was no other light except in the hall, and so, I . . ."

He stopped. His eyes took in Jerry, down to her feet. He frowned, eyeing Jerry's slacks. A tight look flitted across his face. "Well . . ." he cleared his throat. "I then noticed that the man had a gun in his hand."

"What," interrupted Charles, "did he look like?"

"Why—er—he was short, dressed in dark clothes, a black hat pulled over his eyes. He wore a black mask."

Jerry shifted uneasily, conscious of her black fuzzy polo coat, her black slacks, and black fedora hat.

"Did he wear gloves?" the detective asked.

"I couldn't tell, it was all so sudden, so unexpected. I'm afraid I did nothing more than just gape at the gun in his hands. I do remember saying something like, 'I say, what is this?' For a moment, I thought it might be someone playing a prank. Then the voice—it was a cold, unemotional voice—it said, 'Hands up! This is a stick-up!'

"My wife started, I don't think she had seen him until he spoke. She screamed and I saw the gun whip around. I heard the shot, and my wife —she—she just fell forward.

"I stepped toward her, but the gunman was suddenly at my side. I saw that gun in his hands. I couldn't say anything or even move. All I have is a vivid picture of that gun, close to me. I remember seeing the trigger finger tighten—ah, yes, I remember now, he did wear gloves. I felt the impact of the bullet on my shoulder.

Everything seemed to heave and spin . . ." He touched his shoulder.

"I must have fallen, for when I came to, I was on the floor. I looked up, saw my wife was still where she had fallen. I had to call the police, get an ambulance for my wife and myself. Somehow, I managed to get to my feet. I made my way down to the bottom of the stairs, called the police, then I must have passed out again."

He turned stricken eyes to the ambulance surgeon who came back into the room. "My wife—she's all right, isn't she?"

WHEN he was told she was dead, he stared dumbly for a moment, his face working. "Oh, no," he whispered hoarsely. "It's all so . . . so . . ."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Sterling, but we must continue," Charles said. "Now about your safe; it's open. What did you keep there? It's empty now."

"Safe?" Sterling made an effort to adjust his thoughts on the question, but his face reddened with anger. "Why! Good heavens, why did he have to do this to us? Why didn't he just —I'd have given him anything I had. He needn't have shot—shot my wife. Only my wife's jewels were in there and a small amount of cash, that's all."

"Jewels?"

"I don't know which ones. Miss Seery, you spoke to my wife in the office this afternoon; what was she wearing then, you remember?"

"Oh, yes. She was wearing the diamond and sapphire bracelet with the earrings and clip to match."

"Well, whatever she wore she'd have put in the safe. The rest of her things are in the bank vault."

Charles Weber turned to Jerry Seery. "You spoke to Mrs. Sterling this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir," she said meekly. "She asked me to be sure to come tonight for the packages, and to mail them in the morning. She wanted them in the mail quickly, so she asked me to call for them and take care of them for her."

"Mr. Sterling," Charles Weber said, "the person who entered your bedroom and shot you—do you have any suspicion in your mind that he looked like Miss Seery?"

Jerry paled, while Mr. Sterling's eyes went sick.

"I—I just can't believe it. Miss Seery couldn't—"

"But that murderer did look a lot like Miss Seery. You said he was short, wore dark clothes."

"It was a man, I tell you. The voice, it was deep—like a man."

"Voices can be changed. And you thought it was Miss Seery at first, didn't you?" Detective Weber persisted.

"Yes, but I was expecting Miss Seery. I'll admit, not upstairs in the bedroom, but—no! I'll be damned if it could have been Miss Seery!"

"Oh, I don't know," Charles continued, facing a pale and shaken woman. "Loads of things seem to point to Miss Seery. She has a cute little innocent pose and no doubt is a very clever actress. So you saw Mrs. Sterling in the office this afternoon wearing her jewels. You hated Mrs. Sterling, didn't you?"

Jerry Seery compressed her lips. "That's not so!"

"You hated her," Charles continued, "because you're in love with Mr. Sterling."

She gasped, as if he had struck her.

"You're in love with Mr. Sterling," the detective continued. "He's a rich man. Secretaries have set their caps for their bosses before. Clever little scheme. Mrs. Sterling asks you down to this house, you're to take packages away. You hate Mrs. Sterling, you are in love with Mr. Sterling. You come here, get into the house without trouble, go upstairs to the bedroom.

"Masked, you shoot Mrs. Sterling dead, you shoot Mr. Sterling in the shoulder, coming close to him to make sure you only wound him. You go

to the safe, help yourself. You hide the gun and the jewels.

"In the meantime, Mr. Sterling regains consciousness, goes to the phone. When he passes out again, you run out of the house knowing someone will come to his aid.

"Perfect. A perfect little scheme. It would have worked, except that I was where I was, when I was."

"I don't believe it!" Mr. Sterling said thinly. "I simply cannot—"

"You're crazy!" Jerry said in a strangled tone. "You're out of your mind. Hide the jewels and gun? Where?"

"Here!" said Charles and went to the table where the packages were. "In one of them we will find the jewels, money, and the gun." He shuffled through the packages. "Perhaps this one, addressed to Mr. Gerald Spears, care of the General Post Office."

He threw the package to Casey, who quickly unwrapped it. He proved to be right.

"I can't believe it!" Mr. Sterling said quickly. "I can't believe Miss Seery would do a thing like that."

"That's good," said Charles, "because she didn't do anything of the kind."

There was a heavy silence.

"IT WAS you who killed your wife, Mr. Sterling. You devised a rather simple little scheme in order to implicate your secretary. By the clues in this case, the clues of the bloodstains, we were meant to believe that you were shot in your bedroom at the same time your wife was shot, but that's not what happened.

"You shot your wife, rifled your own safe, hid what you had taken, in one of the packages along with the gun after you shot yourself in the shoulder. You did not lose consciousness, but came right down here, called the police. After all this you permitted yourself to lose consciousness, if you did. I can prove all this.

"First of all, Mr. Sterling, you are familiar with your house, I am not, neither is Miss Seery. When I came into your bedroom, I slipped and fell on a scatter rug. This fictitious burglar of yours, according to your own words, came close to you to shoot you. If he did that, he had to step across those scattered rugs and surely would have slipped, as I and Jerry did. But that is not conclusive, he may not have fallen.

"That brings us to point two. Mrs. Sterling was shot facing the mirror. She shouldn't have been. If a burglar had entered that room, she could have seen him in the mirror, should have at least turned around or sprung from her chair, and would have fallen face away from the vanity.

"The position of your wife's body told me that the person who came in the room was someone known to her. However, she might not have seen the person, might have been too stunned to move, so this also may not be conclusive proof. There is one remaining clue, which told me that Miss Seery didn't do it, that no intruder was in the house, and your story is a lie.

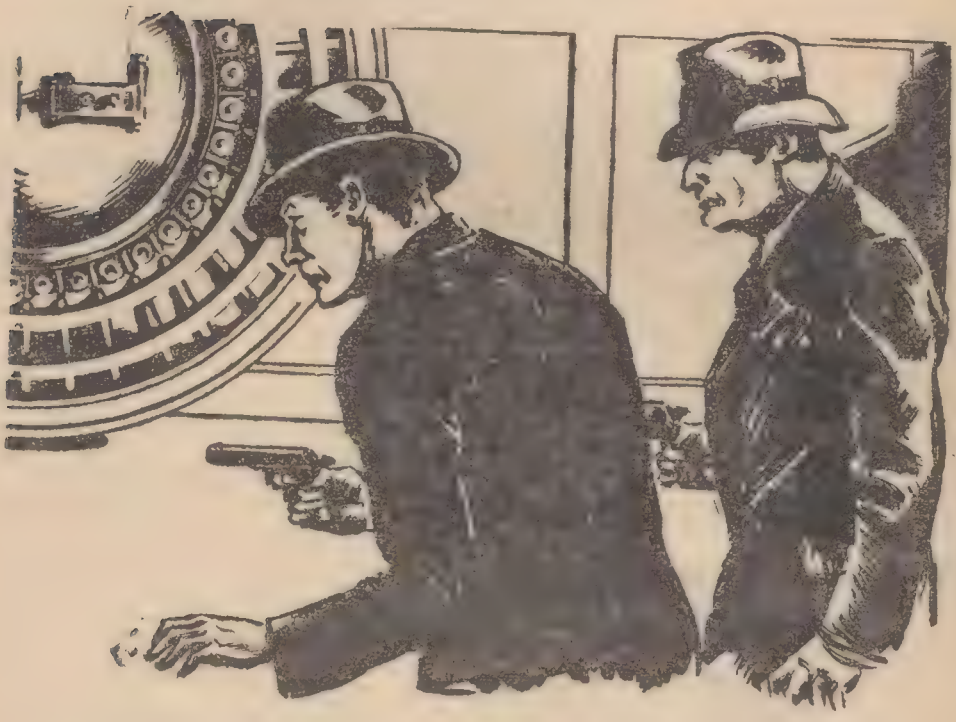
"If it had been a burglar, if your story were true, as I was walking home tonight I would have heard two shots. One fired shortly after the other. As it was, I waited, listened, and heard only one shot.

"That was the shot that you fired into your shoulder. Man that gag's so old, it creaks! And the motive for the murder is obvious. Money? Tiring of your wife? Insurance? We'll find out. We're booking you for murder, sucker! Take him down and lock him up, Casey."

Outside, Jerry hurried away. Charles caught hold of her arm and pulled her to him with a rough, "Commeer!" And he did what he felt he should have done in the first place.

Timekeeper for the Grim Reaper

By Robert S. Fenton



The killer had set the hour of the robbery. But Detective Pat Clary knew a way to fix that crook's clock.

DETECTIVE PAT CLARY and two patrolmen walked into Halpern's pawnshop at seven-thirty in the morning, a frightened little man shuffling at their heels. Halpern's clerk had found the body when he had opened up. Halpern was face downward on the floor—dead. There was a bullet hole between his shoulder blades.

Pat Clary turned the body over. There was very little expression on his face when he looked at Halpern's death mask. He had been a stoop-shouldered man with a face like that of an old fox. The cops had been watching him for months, for they had been sure Halpern had been a fence.

"That's a load off our minds," a cop said.

Clary said, "Yeah. But homicide is homicide, whether it's a choir boy or a third offender that's knocked off."

He got up and mumbled, "Hello, Doc," to the medical examiner who came in and took over.

"He's been dead for quite some time," the medical examiner said. "Rigor mortis has already set in." He took an old silver watch from the dead man's vest pocket. The crystal was smashed. The wateh had stopped at eleven-thirty.

"That's lucky, Clary," he said. "You got the time of the killing."

Clary grilled the frightened clerk. The little man said he could prove he was nowhere near the scene of the crime at that hour and proceeded to prove it. Clary was satisfied. He asked more questions.

"The tin box never got into the safe last night," the clerk said. "The door of the safe is still swinging open. Halpern never used a cash register, because he didn't trust anybody, not even me, and figured they could be fixed. Every night just when he closed up, he put the tin box in the safe. In the morning he took it to the bank. It was always full of dough. Somebody got wise to him doin' it. I warned him more'n once."

"Yeah," Clary said. "Somebody cased this place nice. I got a guy in mind."

Pat Clary had the place photographed and examined for fingerprints, both latent and visible. Then he looked over the compote of second hand stuff clogging the store. In the safe there was a tray of gold watches. One of them bugged Clary's eyes out a little and he pursed his lips as if about to whistle. On the watch case was engraved a pair of little prize-fighters and at their feet was the name Willie Gore.

Clary borrowed the watch. He said to the cops, "Take over, guys. I'll stop in later and see what the boys in the lab found."

He went out of the store and walked along the cluttered sidewalk sifting the thoughts inside his head. Only yesterday he had met Willie not far from the pawnshop. Six months ago he had put Willie in jail for sixty days for vagrancy. Willie had been a pretty tough character on the block when Pat Clary had walked the beat. Willie had led a gang of hoodlums from the time he was fifteen years old.

Willie had won the gold watch in a boxing tournament conducted by the East Side Boys Association. Clary always had been pretty sure Willie had won the easy way.

Pat Clary had stopped Willie Gore and had asked if he were keeping his nose clean. Willie sneered at Clary and hinted that he was much smarter than six months ago. While Clary had kept himself in check, had fought down the urge to pick Willie up and tear off his ears, a wedding procession had rolled down the street, horns blowing and confetti flying. A lot of the colored stuff had peppered Clary and Willie Gore.

"There goes a sucker," Willie had grinned.

PAT CLARY never wasted time. He found out in a small cigar store that Willie was now living in a rooming house seven blocks from Halpern's. He hurried over there to call on Willie. It was about eight-thirty, and he guessed he would find the mug in bed.

The landlady was something of a virago and Clary would not have been surprised if she had ridden a broom upstairs to announce a visitor for Willie.

"What you want to see him about so early, Mister?" the hag wanted to know.

"Look, sweetheart," Pat Clary said and flashed his badge of authority. "It's not to ask him if he was late for vespers. Lead me up to his room."

The woman sniffed and dragged her old bones up the steep stairway. On the third floor, she paused and pointed to a hall room. "He's in there."

Pat Clary knocked on the door. He heard a bed creak, then Willie's gravelly voice. "Who's there?"

"It's me," Clary said. "It's the cops, Willie."

Willie Gore opened the door a few moments later and peered out at Clary. Willie had a narrow tapering face and a pair of eyes set too close together. His draft board medicos had definitely stamped him 4F even before Willie had shed his clothes.

"What's the idea, flatfoot?" Willie said thickly.

"Shut up," Clary said and pushed his way into the room. It was as messy as Willie's soul. "I would like to converse with you, Willie. Sit down there and get ready to answer the sixty-four dollar ones."

"So you raided a crap game maybe," Willie sneered, "an' you found a jackknife with my initials on it. You go after big stuff, copper."

"This time, yeah," the detective admitted. "The biggest thing is murder, Willie. Now where were you last night between eleven and twelve?"

"Last night? Over in Jersey," Willie Gore said without hesitation. "Calling on a doll maybe."

"You could prove that?"

"I guess I could, flatfoot. What you tryin' to hang on me?"

"Halpern, the pawnbroker, was knocked off last night, Willie," Pat Clary said. "He was shot in the back and his tin box full of lettuce is gone."

"No kiddin'? That was a soft touch, huh? Why didn't I know about that?"

"I thought you might," Clary bit out. "That's why I called here, Willie. A guy could case that place a lot of nights and find out Halpern kept that tin box back of the counter instead of a cash register. He might even go in and hock something just to get a line on what the inside was like, Willie. Like maybe a watch or something. What time is it, Willie?"

WILLIE GORE'S grin faded a little. "Oh, so that's it, flatfoot. It's a crime for a guy that gits short of dough to hock his watch, huh? I admit I hocked that watch I won in that fight contest. So what?"

"I just asked." Pat Clary's eyes had been wandering swiftly while he talked to Willie. He saw the clothes draped over the foot of the bed, the brand new pair of yellow shoes under a chair.

"Some outfit you got there, Willie," Clary said and got up and picked up a coat. "Plenty sharp. The loudest ensemble I ever saw outside of a burlesque house. Purplish green, isn't it?"

"It's plenty sharp," Willie Gore said. "How you like the ortchid handkerchief in the pocket, Clary? The doll thought it was the nerts."

Pat Clary picked up the pair of shoes and looked at the soles. They had yet to be scarred by the pavements.

"Didn't they fit?" he asked.

"No," Willie Gore said. "They hurt my feet, copper. You're wastin' your time. When I pull anything again, you won't never be smart enough to nail me, flatfoot. And it'll be big, see?"

Pat Clary, still holding a shoe, shook his head as he stared at Willie. "To think guys are dyin' all over the world to save vermin like you!"

"Look, copper!" Willie Gore snapped. "You beat it, see? I know my rights. I got proof I was in Jersey last night about the time—"

"Stick out your foot, Willie," Clary said, "or I'll break your arm."

"What's the idea?"

"Put this shoe on, rat!" Clary said.

Willie Gore did. Pat Clary laced it up and then ran his hands over the leather. Willie's toes seemed to have plenty of room but Willie winced.

"They're killin' me, copper. Take it off."

"Take it off yourself," the man from headquarters said. "All right, how are you going to prove where you were, Willie?"

"I stopped at a gas station a half mile the other side of the tunnel," Willie said. "The guy will remember me. I tried to git him to gimme three more gallons than the coupons called for. We had an argument about it an' I nearly took a poke at him."

"Scum!" Pat Clary said. "Put on those glad rags, Willie. We're goin' over there."

Willie Gore grinned and reached for his trousers. Clary picked up another shoe that was not very new when Willie's back was turned. He quickly put it down again. He remembered something. He remembered chasing a tire thief one night. He chased the bum for sixteen blocks only to find out the guy was not Willie when he caught up with him.

"Wear the new shoes, Willie," Clary said.

"Why?" Willie Gore's eyes narrowed quickly. Then he laughed. "Okay, maybe you think torturing me will make me confess, copper. That's corny. Okay, I'll wear 'em."

Willie Gore, fully dressed, was a riot of color. He complained that the shoes pinched his feet.

"Nobody would ever forget you once they saw you in that outfit," Clary said and was pretty sure he had Willie started on the way to the hot seat. He wanted to see more. Willie Gore had never been a mental giant.

It had rained last night. Even the weather man, Clary told himself, had not helped Willie the least bit.

"Seen Lippy Holker lately, Willie?" Pat Clary asked casually.

"Who?" Willie asked, giving a soft green felt hat the right angle.

"You know the bum!" Pat said. "Never mind, Willie. It don't matter."

CLARY drove through the tunnel to the New Jersey side, and Willie Gore sat next to him filing his nails and whistling *Pistol Packin' Mama.*

"You are a very happy guy for somebody wearing shoes that kill him," Clary said.

"I ain't walkin' on 'em, am I?" Willie said. "It makes a difference."

"You ain't kiddin', Willie."

The gas station was not hard to find. A Mooroco station next to an empty brick building. Clary swung in and an elderly man came out of the service station. He wore glasses.

"You talk to him, Willie."

"What'll it be?" the attendant asked, then peered closer at Willie. "Say, wasn't you here last night?"

Willie got out of the car to give the man a better look. "Yeah, pal. We had a little argument. Because you was dumb and a patriot. You know a lot of guys are cleanin' up on gas because they forget that rationin'."

"I don't want to do business with the likes of you," the man said and turned to walk away. Willie Gore looked at Clary and laughed. Then he called the man back.

"Look, gran'pa," he said. "You sure I'm the guy?"

"Of course I'm sure. Nobody else I ever saw wore such an outfit," the attendant said sourly.

"How sure are you?" Willie Gore asked and chuckled. "What really happened last night?"

"You tried to make me sell you gas without the tickets. You was going to take a crack at me. Maybe I'm older'n you, but I got a pretty good memory. Of course it was kind of dark here last night, but I'm positive it was you."

"Let's go," Willie Gore said. His grin was wide.

"Just one sec, Willie," Clary said. "You got a sweet alibi, Willie. Too sweet. To make it perfect you had to establish the time. Mister," he asked the gas station attendant, "did this guy ask the time?"

"Let's see now. In a way he did. He pulled out a watch, looked at it, an' asked me was the clock just inside the door there right. I said it was. It was about eleven-thirty. Now look here. Why am I bein' questioned like this? I never sold that man a gill of gas over what he was entitled to. If he said—"

Pat Clary got Willie by the arm and turned him around. "You're under arrest, Willie. For the murder of J. D. Halpern. What time is it, Willie?"

"Look here, flatfoot," Willie said

in a terribly dry voice. "You know I hocked—I—"

"Right, Willie. Your stooge forgot that or you didn't tell him." Pat Clary grinned. "You didn't have a watch, but you flashed one here last night. Willie, you were nowhere near New Jersey last night and you might as well admit it. Stick out those paws, Willie, so I can snap these bracelets on."

Willie Gore's face was as gray as the Hudson when Pat Clary drove back through the tunnel. He kept saying Clary would have to have more proof than he had. He'd have to prove Lippy Holker wore those fancy clothes.

"I'll try," Clary grinned.

IN HEADQUARTERS three hours later, Willie Gore watched the detective unwrap a pair of shoes. They were Willie's not-so-new shoes. Clary unwrapped them very very carefully. Out in the next room the cops had Lippy Holker.

"Now tell me if I'm wrong, Willie," Clary said. "While Lippy was dressed in that outfit you bought and was planting an alibi for you in New Jersey, you were in Halpern's knocking off that fence. You cased the place like I said, Willie.

"Maybe you tried to find the watch you hocked before you ran out, but it so happened it was of gold. Halpern always put the gold ones in the safe and did not leave them in the showcase. Lippy is the same build as you and could pass for you in the dark, so the guy running the gas station could easy make the natural mistake."

"It's a lie," Willie Gore choked out. The sweat was shiny on his thin face.

"One slip at a time," Clary said. "You bought a pair of new yellow shoes to go with the sharpy outfit and then found that they were too small for Lippy. Sure, Lippy had your build but not your feet. So Lippy couldn't wear the shoes to New Jersey. He wore his own shoes. And speaking of shoes, Willie, it rained late last night. The weather man tricked you too. It can rain here and not in Jersey. Look on the sole of your shoe here, Willie. These little bits of colored paper. Unless it had been raining, they couldn't have stuck to your shoe near the heel. It is confetti, Willie. You remember when I stood talking to you not far from the pawnshop yesterday, a wedding procession went by. Confetti was flying, Willie."

"You can't—" Willie Gore's words got thick on his tongue and nearly choked him.

"It was quite a scheme for a flathead like you, Willie," Pat Clary said. "But it was too big for what brains you got. You had so many loose ends showing, it was a shame. Yeah, I had to figure out why a guy all dressed up for a date would not wear brand new yellow shoes that fit him very nice, Willie.

"It was the watch, though, that hurt you pretty bad, Willie. Naturally you told Lippy to be sure to establish the time in the gas station man's head. They're workin' on Lippy out there, and I understand you only give him two hundred dollars, Willie. You told him there was only five hundred in the tin box. We told Lippy there was twelve grand and he is burning! And he's talking by now."

A cop came in and grinned at Pat Clary. "Lippy came clean, Pat. Right now he is cussing out Willie."

"There was only five hun'red in it!" Willie Gore fairly yelled. "You dirty—?" He tried to bring his cuffed hands down on Clary's skull, but he was floored even as he lifted them.

"Take him out," Pat Clary said. "They'll have to pad the chair to make his scrawny body fit in it. Before he pulled that job he should have used up some red points in a butcher shop to buy himself a brain. Say, what time is it, D.A.?"

The Hick and the Hijackers

By William Hellmann

Johnny's truck took on a surprise night load—armed convicts. Yet instead of delivering them to freedom, gunless Johnny had a way of consigning them back to the pen.

THEY got aboard just by simply waiting for him in the dark on Tuscarora, opening the door, and stepping into the cab as the big van labored over the top. Johnny's first thought was to resist, but the squat black gun in the big man's fist stopped his reach for the heavy jack handle at his heels.

"I wouldn't," the big man said softly, but Johnny shivered at the chill threat in the voice. "You might get hurt." Johnny couldn't see his eyes but the flat, moon-face was a queer white in the reflected glow of the headlights.

"You're Potts and Fry, the two convicts that escaped this morning," Johnny blurted.

"Why yes," the big man, Fry, said genially. "You're bright—and I hope you're smart, too. The coppers are still looking for us, stopping all cars, but they'll not bother you. You're a regular on this road and they know you. Who would look for us in a truck?" He chuckled. "A well-laid plan. So be nice and don't—"

"Don't take none of his slack," Potts snarled. He was a small man, little and skinny, with a harsh rasping voice. "He ain't got no choice."

"Take it easy," Fry advised mildly. "We've a lot of hours together until we get to where we are going. We may as well spend them pleasantly. You climb up in the bunk and cover up; we don't want the cops seeing both of us." He smiled at Johnny. "If they do get nosy, I'm a guard sent along to watch the load. Yes! A valuable load, indeed." He chuckled dryly.

"You're going to hijack this truck," Johnny said. "It's part of your plan. Someone spotted those clothes for you, you cut through the mountains, and waited for me back along the road. You knew I was coming through. Now you'll get past the patrol, then you'll use my load to buy underworld help to get into hiding."

Behind him Potts stirred, snarled a curse, but Fry chuckled again. "You catch on quick. Or did you." He thought about it. "If someone squealed—no, I guess not, or the cops would have—" His voice went soft smooth. "Be smart—or else—"

Johnny shivered again. It'll be "or else" he thought bitterly. They are too desperate, have too much at stake to let me go. Two guards died today that they might go free; one more murder to save that freedom would not matter.

Sudden despair overwhelmed him. He wasn't afraid. But he was letting Pop down. Pop had sunk everything in this outfit, in getting him this haul. Because one leg was slightly shorter than the other, the Army wouldn't let him do his share. Then he learned someone was needed to get this alky to the loading plants, and Pop had backed him.

Desperately, he wished Pop was here; he'd know how to handle these rats. He would find a way. He'd had

a lot of experience with wise guys like these before he retired.

"Just keep her rolling," Fry directed, leaning back. "No stops."

"But there's the—" Johnny began, then said hastily, "All right, no stops."

Fry looked at him, thought a while. "Smart, eh? You have a regular stop where you report in. If we pass it, the guy there will know something's wrong and call the patrol." His voice was grieved. "Now you wouldn't want to do anything to get hurt, would you? So we'll make that stop as usual. Where is it?"

"About ten miles ahead," Johnny said sullenly. "It's a combination beanery and gas station."

"Fine, fine! I'm starved. Had to leave in a slight hurry this morning, Cokey and I. We didn't have time for lunch. Step on it, kid."

WHEN the lights of the station came around a bend to meet them, Johnny swung off, rolled up along the pumps. Through the lighted window, they could see a tall, powerfully built man, white-haired, sitting on a stool reading a paper.

"Be nice," Fry warned softly, as they walked toward the door. "Or it'll be too bad for you—and your hick friend."

Johnny stopped. "Don't you hurt him," he said quickly. "He—he's a nice guy, a harmless d-duffer." He went on with a rush. "His name is Caldwell, R-Reuben Caldwell. He's a retired farmer. We all call him Rube."

"Well, call him it, for all I care. But act natural. Try any fancy stunts and—"

"I won't," Johnny said. He took a deep breath, posed as though getting set for a race, then stepped quickly into the light.

"Hi Rube," he greeted cheerily, swung away from the counter to hang his cap and jacket on the wall rack. He wasted time there trying to stop the tremble of his lips.

The counterman looked up quickly, something in his eyes. "Hello Johnny," he said quietly. He glanced at the two men sitting at the counter. "Evenin'."

Johnny came over and sat down and pulled the paper across to him. "Ham and a couple eggs, Rube," he said, not looking up from the paper.

"Coming right up," the big man said. "Yours, gentlemen? The same? Okay. You got company tonight, Johnny."

"Yes." He kept his head bent down to the paper. "Boss thought I could use a guard tonight, on account of the fuss upstate."

"Yeh." He went back into the kitchen and soon the little room was filled with the savory smell of frying ham, the liquid sizzle of eggs in a skillet. He came back into the room. "Ready in a jiffy, men."

He came around the counter, went up front and pulled down the blind. He came back. As he passed the two convicts, his big hands shot out suddenly, and he brought their heads together in a crash that could be heard above the sizzle of the eggs. With almost the same motion, he caught the skinny Potts by the neck and flung him into the corner.

Fry clawed for his gun, but Caldwell's huge fist caught him at the base of the skull. He, too, lost all interest.

Corporal Crowley and two troopers came to take them away. "A good job, Johnny," the corporal said.

"I get it," Fry said bitterly. The softness was gone from his voice, hate looked out of the little eyes. "He's your old man. You played me for a lousy sap. You didn't want to stop here! Like hell you didn't! But how did you tip him off?"

Johnny laughed. "That was a cinch. Pop is retired all right, but he's not a farmer. And his name is Robert, not Reuben."

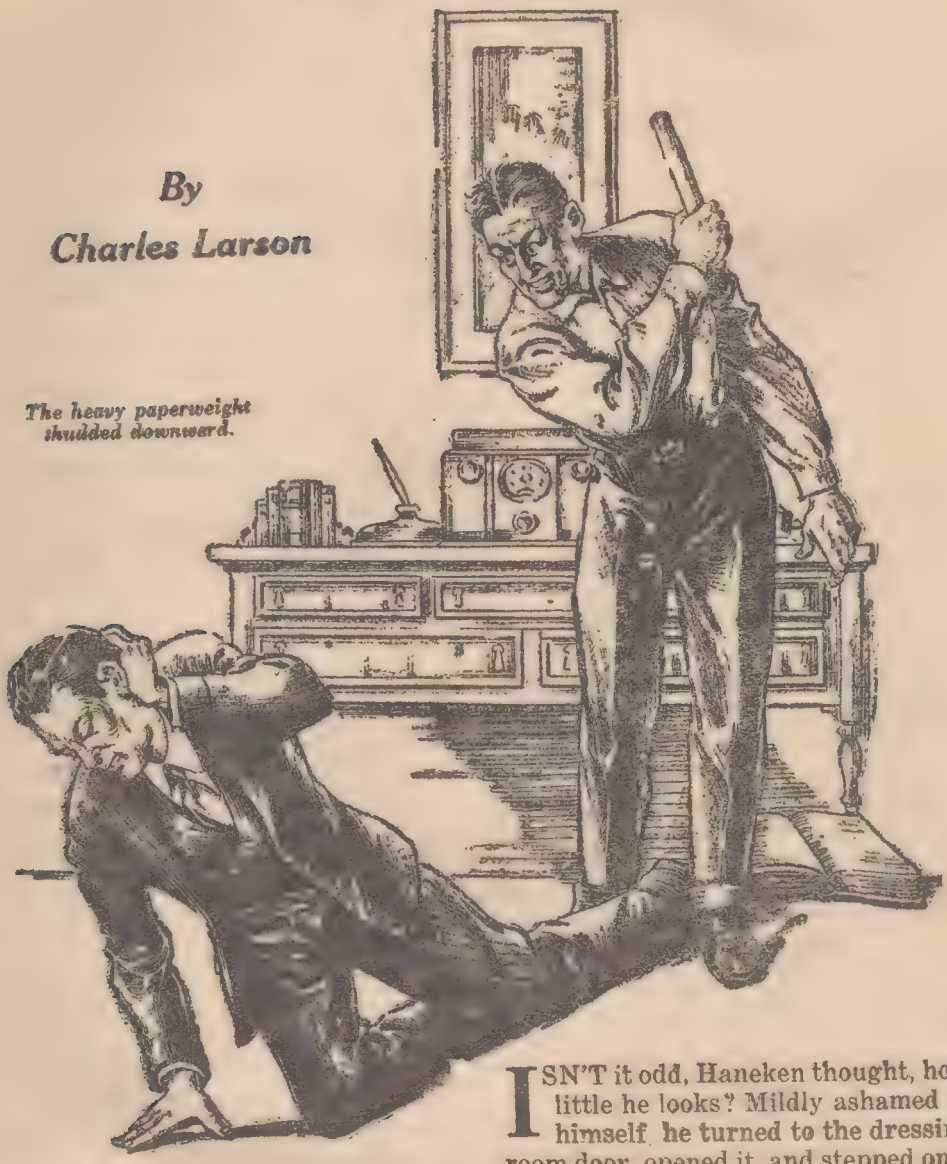
"But how—?"

"He was a roustabout for Barnum's for forty years—and 'Hey Rube' is a call for help in any circus man's language."

Suicide Scenario

By

Charles Larson



The heavy paperweight thudded downward.

The script of that film never called for a close-up with a noose, but the star was cast that way just the same. And it was up to Publicity Man Haneken to advertise the real slayers' name or study the preview from his slab in the morgue.

ISN'T it odd, Haneken thought, how little he looks? Mildly ashamed of himself he turned to the dressing room door, opened it, and stepped onto the stage.

A grip, small, nervous, Irish, passed him, and Haneken said, "Bud, will you find Grenville and tell him there's been an accident?"

"Sure," the stagehand said. Then, softly, "The old boy crocked again?" He tilted his head toward the dressing room.

"Not this time." Haneken rubbed one hand across his eyes. "I'm afraid he's dead."

"Oh," the grip said. Nodding, he moved away. In a few moments he was back, his eyes curious. "Didn't get it," he said.

"You got it. Tommy Archer is dead." Haneken spoke slowly, distinctly, forming each syllable. "It looks as though he's hung himself."

"Archer?"

"What the hell is this? Do you know where Grenville is or don't you?"

"Yeah. Sure. Grenville." White-faced the grip scurried into the dimness, the cords in his neck straining. "Mr. Grenville! *Grenville!"*

Haneken reached into his pocket for a cigarette, couldn't find a match, put the cigarette back. He was surprised to find how steady his hands were. He should have been shot to pieces. Matinee idols didn't kill themselves every day in the week, and they didn't kill themselves without a damned good reason. It so happened that Archer's reason had been as clear as the swollen tongue in his mouth.

The heart of a film studio, despite the shouts and ravings of directors like Grenville, actors, and sundry other minor characters, is the clapboard hangout of the flacks, the publicity scribblers. Stars are made because some red-eyed press agent has sat up all night dreaming, and stars are broken when the dreams aren't bright enough.

The dreams Dee Haneken made about Tom Archer had been beautiful, full-bodied, perfectly constructed—nightmares. True nightmares, except for one small point, in this case.

Tom Archer had been a juvenile when sound was only a thing experts said couldn't be done, and when the biggest star in pictures was a sad, homely man named Lon Chaney. He'd come up the hard way, through the fabulous thirties, through technicolor, and he'd emerged strong, secure, untouched.

In 1933 he'd won an Academy Award for his supporting performance in *Starlight,* and a few years later he'd nearly won it again, but at M-G-M some genius made a film called *Captains Courageous,* and an up-and-comer named Spencer Tracy had taken the Oscar without much objection from the rest of the field.

Through most of this Tom Archer had remained a slightly egotistical, but essentially good, kid. He'd been easy with the publicity men. He'd given them stories about his love life, his home life, and his night life. Suddenly, no one knew why, everything was changed. Overnight, he spoke of Bette Davis and himself in the same breath. Who was Muni? What the hell had Robert Donat got that he hadn't?

Someone might have whispered, "Acting ability," but they didn't. And so Archer, *Thomas* Archer now, went his merry way, demanding his own cameramen, his own director, calling for changes he knew nothing about in an already perfect script.

His attitude toward publicity changed along with everything else. He became inaccessible. When Haneken, who handled him, asked how his mother reacted to certain of his pictures, he snapped, "Keep my family out of your rotten stories."

His family was kept out. His family, his background, and his idle chatter. Gradually, fan magazines dropped him because of the lack of material. His fan mail dwindled. His pictures, unbraced by publicity, became just pictures. People went away from them saying, "The Mickey Mouse was O.K., but the feature!"

A star was dying.

Haneken had hastened the throes. Somewhere he'd dug up stories of Archer's early life. In quaint dispatches he'd drawn a charming, deadly picture of a pre-Hays roué. For the smack of authenticity, he'd linked Archer's name with that of a producer's secretary named Jean something-or-other, who had met Archer just once—in the commissary—over a plate of baked beans.

To the last Archer had held out. When they'd given him the script of *The Colonel and the Lady*, and had assigned a new director (recently raised from the shorts ranks) to make it, he'd threatened a walkout. Promptly his studio had suspended him.

Not two days ago, he'd come back, fiery, but repentant.

And now he was dead.

Haneken shuddered, thinking.

ACROSS the stage, two men were half-running toward him. George Grenville, the director, was young and balding, and stooped from too many years over college books. He shouted, still twenty yards away:

"What the hell is this, Haneken?"

"Quite a mess, George."

"The fathead you sent over told me Archer was hurt."

"You might put it that way, yes."

"Where is he?" Grenville stopped, his face red from his hurrying. He waved vaguely at the flying officer beside him. "You know Major Petersen, our technical advisor."

Haneken said, "The face is familiar, Major."

"I don't think we've met. Once you stopped by when I was trying to convince an obstinate painter that the stars on the bottoms of a plane's wings had five points."

"How badly is he hurt?" Grenville asked abruptly.

"Archer? He's dead, George."

"*Dead!*"

"Good grief," Major Petersen said. He raised one hand to the wings on his tunic, rubbed them as though some genie would appear to solve everything.

"I found him in his dressing room," Haneken murmured. "He'd hanged himself."

Swearing, Grenville pushed beyond him, entered the small, boxlike room.

Soon he was back, his lips trembling. "Call an ambulance," he said to no one in particular. "Gosh-darn it, does everything have to happen to me?"

"It's a hard life, George," Haneken said.

He walked away, conscious of Grenville's eyes on his back. *Perhaps it's shock that makes me this way*, he thought. And yet, he knew he wasn't shocked. Not in the least. His only regret was that suicides made rotten stories . . .

The first one to actually accuse him of murder was the producer's secretary, Jean something-or-other.

She came to his stuffy office as soon as the news was released. ("Into the dark from which there is no returning, today went Thomas Archer, Academy Award winning motion picture actor. Archer, under contract to Sidney Ross Studios, was stricken while on the set of his latest picture, *The Colonel and the Lady*. Said Major Robert E. Petersen, technical advisor, 'Archer was a great man. He shall be missed.' His death was attributed to a glandular ailment.")

Haneken looked up when the girl knocked on his open door. "Yeah?" he said.

"Are you Dee Haneken?"

"Yes. Come in."

"Thank you."

The girl moved prettily into the room, took a chair opposite Haneken's desk. "I'm Jean Richards."

Haneken raised his eyebrows. "Cigarette?"

"I don't smoke."

Carefully Haneken put the cigarette in his own mouth, struck a match on his shoe. The girl was amazingly attractive. Haneken let his eyes rest on her crossed knees, coughed, and glanced away.

"Hell of a fine day for the beach," he began, "I don't suppose . . ."

"Mr. Haneken," the girl said, "tell me what happened to Tom Archer."

"Thyroid or something. I really couldn't say."

"I mean really. Why did he kill himself?"

Her voice brought his head up sharply. Surprised, he saw that she

was trembling. "Look Miss Richards," he said.

"Mr. Haneken." The girl spoke softly, trying to control her voice. "I shouldn't have come here. I know that. I shouldn't be talking to you now. But someone downstairs told me you were the one who wrote that story about Mr. Archer and me. I had to get a look at the man who could—who could . . ."

"Please . . ."

"Can't you see what I must seem like to other people now?" Suddenly the control was gone and the quiet voice rose, broke. "Can't you? Can't you understand that Mr. Archer was married? You *must* have known. I did. Some day I must show you the letter his wife wrote me. Or can you read, Mr. Haneken?"

"Now just a minute—"

But the girl was going on and Haneken could only sit with his mouth open, listening. "It's not a pretty letter. I don't know why you hated him, but I do know this. Mr. Archer didn't commit suicide. He may have killed himself, but it wasn't suicide. You murdered him as surely as though you'd put the rope around his neck yourself!"

Openly crying now, the girl ran from the office.

For a long time, Haneken could hear the sound of her heels tapping down the wooden hallway.

IT WASN'T an easy thing to get back onto the stage he'd left, but he managed it by promising the cop on duty that he'd get his name in news releases.

Police were everywhere, their dark blue uniforms making sad splotches against the scenery.

Slowly Haneken approached the dressing room that still had Archer's name drawn in English script on its door. Major Petersen was the first to notice him. He was talking with Marshall Ryan, the studio police chief, and he said:

"We were looking for you. There seems to be a few questions—"

"Haneken," Ryan broke in, "we'll need a statement. For instance, why the devil did you drop in on Archer when you did?"

"Makes a frightfully unromantic story, Marsh. I wanted to ask him about his suspension. Why all the mystery?"

For a moment Ryan didn't answer. And when he did, his voice was too casual. "Because he was murdered. Because someone on the lot did it."

Haneken let his breath out slowly. His lips formed the word "murdered," but he couldn't seem to get it past his tongue. At last he whispered, "You're sure?"

"He was strangled before the rope was put around his neck. As a matter of fact, the M.E. says it was a particularly sloppy job. No cord burns. The neck was broken after he was dead, when the chair was pushed from under him."

Quietly, Ryan handed around a package of cigarettes, and when each of them had taken one, struck a match on his thumbnail. "Haneken," he said, "to put it as bluntly as I can—" He reached forward, lit Haneken's cigarette, and the major's, and was about to light his own, when the flying officer screamed a little and knocked the match out of his hand.

"Good grief," Petersen said. He was white-faced.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Of course." Ryan kicked at the match with his foot. "I forgot. Three on a match and all that."

"Sorry as hell to be so superstitious," the major said, "but the flying corps does it to you somehow."

"Quite all right. I should have known."

He turned toward Haneken, who was already half in the dressing room, and shouted, but the door was closing and Haneken didn't answer.

The body had been removed, of course, and the room was empty. It was tiny and square. The smell of

grease-paint was heavy on the air.

Once inside, Haneken was struck with the realization that he hadn't the slightest reason for coming back. It frightened him.. Haneken was part of the old school of publicity. He'd been born and raised in the clipping room. He'd mentally grown up in sheer publicity tradition, where the story was the thing and to hell with instinct. A publicist didn't explain; he reported. And if, in the reporting, someone got hurt, it was none of his business.

On the books, it was that way. But the books seemed to lack provision for a crying girl.

Disturbed, Haneken turned to leave. And it was then he saw the scrap of paper. It was a very small scrap. It had been torn from a cheap, lined notebook. Curiously he picked it up, glanced at it.

"Haneken!" someone said from the door. "Damn it, I gave orders . . ."

Haneken raised his head, his thin face smooth.

"Come out of there! What the hell . . ."

Folding the paper, the tall publicity man walked to the entrance, stepped outside. "Sorry," he said, "I wasn't thinking."

He smiled and started across the stage. In a moment he stopped and said over his shoulder, "By the way, if you saw '614S31' on a slip of paper somewhere, what would you take it to mean?"

Major Petersen frowned. "License number?"

"Insurance policy," said the police chief.

Haneken lifted a hand, nodded. "Thanks," he murmured.

THE day was one to make the L. A. Chamber of Commerce mad with joy. High in the still, cool blue heavens, one clean cloud drifted lazily toward Mexico. A plane, an Army bomber, split the air effortlessly, the white star on its right wing glistening in the sunlight when it turned. There was the thick hum of utter silence everywhere. A sun, lush as butter, fastened itself at noon and didn't move at all.

It was a slow, wonderful time. Haneken thought wistfully of the beach, but always there was the picture of the girl who had come to his office at the beach with him, and not liking him. No matter how his feet objected, they continued taking him to the Research Department where all things, perhaps even a list of license numbers or insurance policies, were on hand, waiting to be looked at. Afterwards the beach. After a murder had been solved, and a girl's name had been cleared, and the real story had been written and done with.

The Research Department was a fine, miniature reproduction of the Library downtown. It was dark and gloomy. Its books were very official and almost as dry.

He said to the girl on duty, "Honey, you wouldn't have a list of the state license numbers and their owners knocking about somewhere, would you?"

"We might."

"What kind of a bribe would it take to let me see 'em?"

"What'll you offer?"

"A kiss?"

"Heaven forbid," she said distastefully.

Haneken said, "This place has no dignity. Here I offer, in a purely Platonic way—"

"Tell you what," the girl said. "I'll let you look them up if you *don't* give me a kiss."

"I'm insulted. Deeply. But you're on."

The girl grinned up at him. She rose, came around to the front of the desk. "What year are you interested in?"

"Year? This one, I suppose."

"This year. And what part of the state?"

"Look, sweet,"—Haneken put his hands on her shoulders—"all I want—"

"I know. But it has to be narrowed

down. Tell me what the license number is. Maybe I could go from that."

Haneken fumbled in his pocket, brought out the tiny slip of paper. "Ah . . . 614S31." He glanced up.

The girl peered suspiciously at him. "What is this? April Fool or something?"

"Why?"

"Well, heaven only knows what those figures stand for. But it isn't a license number. The 'S' is too far over for one thing."

"Could it be the serial number for a—an insurance policy?"

"Oh, please."

Haneken studied the paper, his lower lip stuck out. "Yeah," he murmured.

"Perhaps it stands for the call number of a library book."

"Hm?"

"I said—"

"I know. I know. I'm thinking. Perhaps it does." He flicked at the paper with one finger. "It could, I suppose, at that. Tell me—"

"Before you even go on, the answer is 'no.' Our books aren't listed that way. Your only chance would be if someone has ordered such a book from the public library downtown."

"And have they?"

She took the paper, moved with twenty-year-old grace to the bronze filing cabinet near the back wall. In a moment she called over her shoulder, "I'm a genius. With my hunches I should play the horses more." She walked back to Haneken, grinning.

"It seems that Mr. Thomas Archer requested this book on the fourteenth. It hasn't been returned yet. Want a look?"

"May I?"

"Believe it or not, that's what they pay me for." She felt under the desk, still smiling at him, and presently brought out a thick, blood-red book the size of a small horse. She glanced at its binding, handed it to Haneken. "There you are," she said.

"Thanks." Haneken tried to make out the Latin title, couldn't.

"Mr. Grenville . . ." he heard the girl say conversationally.

Quickly he turned, in time to see Grenville's broad back disappearing through the doorway.

"Everybody's interested in us today," the girl said. "First a famous director comes in, then an infamous publicist . . ."

"That was George?" Haneken asked, and didn't hear her answer.

For a time, he turned the book over idly in his hands, musing.

"Mr. Haneken," the girl said wearily.

Startled, he looked up.

"I asked you if you wanted to take the book?"

"Oh. Sorry. I wasn't listening. Yeah, I want to take it." Slowly Haneken tucked the book under one arm, and made his way into the sunshine again.

He was frowning.

LOOKING back on it, the attack wasn't such a bad one. Years later, Haneken consoled himself with the thought that he might have been killed, but wasn't.

It happened just as he stepped into the small, yellow outer office of Martin Vernet, the young wonder who produced most of Tom Archer's pictures. The girl he'd wanted to see wasn't there. The office was empty, but someone had left a small radio going. A dance band was quietly ruining one of Tschaikovsky's better works. Haneken remembered thinking, *How could Vernet miss in a setup like this, and a secretary like Jean what's-her-name to keep his books?*

He remembered that, and the exquisitely blinding whiteness that shot like a hot knife into the back of his head when someone hit him from behind. Then there was nothing outside the fuzz of the carpet in his nose.

Nothing real.

He saw the nervous feet of someone stop by him. He felt the sweating hands pulling at the book beneath him, but all that might have been a dream.

He knew his head was bleeding; he

now HITLER'S PRIVATE DOCTOR tells All!

FOR THE FIRST TIME—DER FUEHRER'S INCREDIBLE, SHOCKING INTIMACIES REVEALED BY

The Most Sensational Disclosures Ever Made About Any Person

By all normal, human standards—what a Rotten psychological background this fiend-incarnate reveals, to his own private physician who lived Hitler's own life through the whole 15 years of Hitler's rise to power. And these confidential confessions, which explain Hitler's inhuman aberrations, his madness for power, his hatred of the Jews, his vitriolic temper, his blood lust, his lust for sex abnormalities, were made to give him a greater grip on himself and on the enslaved, miserable "beneficiaries" under the "new order."

Dr. Krueger LIVED History—You READ It

These terrible confessions, these ghastly self-revelations, were written into this astounding scientific, first-hand psychoanalysis of Hitler by Dr. Krueger, his own physician, after he fled Germany to save himself from the Hitler purge. And the book was written only in the hope that widespread detailed knowledge of Hitler's abysmal cruelties of body, mind, and soul, would incense the world enough to help PURGE Hitler.

Every Patriot Will Read This Amazing Must Book

If you hate Hitler now, no word in our language will describe your feelings AFTER you have read "I Was Hitler's Doctor." It holds you breathless. It carries you from astonishment to amazement, to freezing shock and back again—repeatedly. For you see

WHAT HITLER TOLD DR. KRUEGER

Yes, through fifteen years Hitler—the diabolical, intuitive Fuehrer—was seeking mental relief through psychoanalysis, and to Dr. Krueger, in man to man discussions, he confessed his sex love for his mother, his venereal taint, his degradation and murder of his glamorous young niece, his abnormal relations with Captain Roehm and other men—indeed most of these authenticated revelations are so affecting that they may not even be mentioned in an advertisement. Now you, too, for only $1.98, can know as much of Hitler as Dr. Krueger does; and understand your new-found knowledge fully because of the brilliant doctor's lucid, scientific explanations.

Kurt Krueger, M. D.—An Ex-Nazi

Dr. Krueger writes without passion or prejudice, with medical college frankness. He is both a Christian and an "Aryan" and was a Nazi, till he realized the debasing purposes of the "cult"—for cult it really is.

Upton Sinclair

This Famous American author says in a special introduction to this book: "I take the liberty of telling the critics and the book readers of my country that this volume is of great importance to our times."

Otto Strasser

Ex-aide of Hitler, the man who came to power with Hitler and was one of his most intimate friends until he escaped Hitler's blood purge, writes special introduction to this book revealing his intimate knowledge of Hitler.

K. ARVID ENLIND, M.D., LT. COL. MED. RES., U. S. ARMY

In a special preface to this book, says: "As a doctor, I recognize the phenomena described as human, and as such understandable."

THIS IS WHAT THIS SENSATIONAL BOOK REVEALS

- Hitler and his Secret Disease
- Frustration and Impotence
- The Patient's Confession
- Hitler's Bestialism
- Campaign Against Jews
- Hitler and His Women
- Hitler's Prison Days
- The Roehm-Hess Relationship
- Hitler's Perversions
- Why Hitler Had No Wife
- Blitz-Dreams and Nightmares
- Attempted Assassination
- The Suicide Complex
- Hitler's Odyssey of Torture
- Murder Complex

DON'T MISS THIS MOST IMPORTANT BOOK OF THE WHOLE WAR—from the personal, confidential files of one of Europe's eminent psychologists.

"I was Hitler's doctor"

Never Before—Such a Literary Miracle

Imagine! Dr. Krueger had to live the subject matter of this epoch-making book. His knowledge made Hitler fear him and hate him. He had to flee Germany to live, for he, too, was on the purge list. So he dedicates this literary miracle to the reclamation of the world, to the establishment of the Four Freedoms. You MUST read this book. Your family and friends should read it. Simply read the coupon—then send it, but no money—and these supremely useful historical facts become yours.

Send no money with coupon $1.98

10-Day Trial

Biltmore Publishing Co.,
233 Fourth Ave., Dept. 4304
New York 3, N. Y.

Rush my copy of "I Was Hitler's Doctor." When the postman arrives with my book, I will pay him $1.98 plus small postage and C. O. D. charge. I understand that I may read the book for 10 days and if I am not completely satisfied I may return it for full refund.

☐ Mail C.O.D. I will pay postman $1.98 plus few cents postage.
☐ I enclose $1.98—mail postpaid.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

INTERSTATE MUTUAL BENEFIT ASS'N,
Dept. 3204, DOVER, DELAWARE

Please send me FREE full details concerning your Hospitalization Policy.

Name .....

Street .....

City ..... State .....

CHARM PERFUME

An enchanting perfume of irresistible allure, clinging for hours with ineffable, fascinating fragrance. Just a tiny drop is enough. Full size bottle 98c prepaid, or $1.32 C.O.D. Directions free. One bottle FREE if two are ordered.

REXBELL, Box 124, Dept. 327,
Huntington Station, New York

10 Selected DRESSES $3.25

Imagine getting 10 selected dresses for only $3.25! Top values. Smart in style, pattern, and material. Each dress pressed, cleaned, ready to wear. Assorted colors and materials. Sizes up to 38. Larger sizes 5 for $3.00. Send 50c deposit, balance C.O.D. plus postage. Satisfaction guaranteed. Many other bargains for entire family. FREE CATALOG.

ECONOMY MAIL ORDER HOUSE
351 Grand St., Dept. AD, New York, N. Y.

USED Correspondence Courses

Complete home-study courses and self-instruction books, slightly used. Sold, rented, exchanged. All subjects. Satisfaction guaranteed. Cash paid for used courses. Full details and 84-page illustrated bargain catalog FREE. Write today!

NELSON CO.
321 S. Wabash Dept. 230 Chicago

don't WORRY

ABOUT RUPTURE

Why put up with years of needless discomfort and worry? Try a Brooks Automatic Air Cushion. This marvelous appliance permits the opening to close, yet holds reducible rupture securely, comfortably—day and night. Thousands report amazing results. Light, neat-fitting. No hard pads or stiff springs to chafe or gouge. Made for men, women and children. Durable, cheap. **Sent on trial to prove it.** Never sold in stores. Beware of imitations. Write for Free Book on Rupture, no-risk trial order plan, and proof of results. All correspondence confidential.
BROOKS COMPANY, 101-C State St., Marshall, Mich.

could feel the warmth of wetness already matting his hair. Uncaring, he watched the feet move toward the secretary's desk, stop, move uneasily around.

In a moment there was a small commotion when the telephone receiver bumped against the desk. Then, startlingly, the radio came to staccato life.

Haneken clutched at reality. He was much too far away to hear the dial sounds from the telephone itself, but miraculously, as radios annoyingly will, the harsh dial numbers were sputtering from the tiny amplifier like hail. Already he'd missed the first one (it must have been eight or nine by the length of it), but now his mind caught and recorded the others as they came.

Careful, he thought. That was easy. Three.

The radio spat twice. 8 or 9-3-2 . . .

One for the last.

8321.

His head weaved in a loose, ever-widening circle from the strain of thinking.

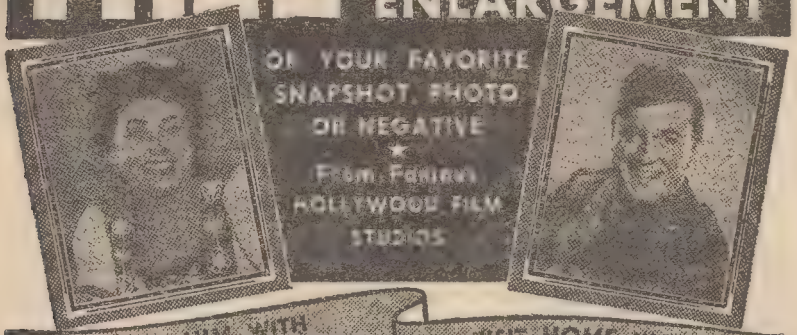
The man at the phone was speaking suddenly, "Hello. Yeah." His voice was sharp, shaking. "I got it. What now? . . . I'm in the Administration Building. Vernet's office . . . Will you stop worrying? This is where he led me when I followed him . . . No . . . alone . . . No. Will you calm down? . . . No . . . No . . . The hell with that . . . I don't give a damn *what* you'll tell. You're in this thing deeper than I am. Archer wasn't my business . . . What? No, listen . . ."

Haneken tensed his fingers, relaxed them, tried to raise his head. It didn't move. He felt a drop of sweat trickle down his side from the effort.

"Listen to me," the voice was saying, "you're the big shot in this mess. Kill him yourself . . . *How* much? No."

Haneken blew quietly at the fuzz in his face. The voice was familiar. Where the devil . . .

FREE HOLLYWOOD ENLARGEMENT



5" x 7" ENLARGEMENT ABSOLUTELY FREE!

Just to get acquainted, we will make and send you FREE a portrait-quality, 5 x 7 inch enlargement of any picture or negative! Just send us your most cherished snapshot or photo (either the actual picture or the negative) and you will receive FREE a beautiful PROFESSIONAL Hollywood Studio Enlargement! Send a picture to that boy in service—send a picture to the home folks! Act now!

Important—Be sure to include color of hair, eyes and clothing and get our Bargain Offer for having your enlargement beautifully hand colored in oil—then mounted in your choice of handsome frames. Artistic hand coloring adds character, beauty and personality to your enlargement! Please enclose 10c and your original picture or negative will be returned with the free 5 x 7 enlargement, postpaid.

HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS, 7021 Santa Monica Blvd., Dept. 131, Hollywood, Calif.

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY!

Look through your album now—pick out your favorite snap shot. Send it with this coupon today! Offer limited to U. S.

HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS, Dept. 131
7021 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood, California.

Please make me one FREE 5" x 7" enlargement of enclosed picture or negative. I enclose 10c. Return enlargement and original, postpaid.

NAME_____ COLOR HAIR_____

ADDRESS_____ COLOR EYES_____

CITY_____ STATE_____ COLOR CLOTHING_____

LAW

STUDY AT HOME for PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGER EARNINGS. 32 years expert instruction—over 108,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for FREE BOOK—"Law and Executive Guidance".

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 40-A, 8 East Huron St., Chicago, Ill.

CASH

FOR YOUR SURPLUS UNUSED UNITED STATES STAMPS

Mail Order Dealers: Collectors: We buy accumulations and surplus UNUSED U. S. Postage Stamps at 90% face value for denominations ½c to 19c. 85% face value for denominations 20c to 50c. Small lots 80%. MAIL STAMPS REGISTERED. Money sent by return mail. GARBER SERVICE, 72 5th Ave., Dept. 404, New York City

---

DICE : PASSERS OR MISSOUTS

$2 per set

Lodestone, 7 Keys to Power, $1 each. Oils, Candles, Books, Powders, Charms. Catalog FREE.

D. SMYTHE CO., Box 8, Newark, Mo.

SUPPORT the *Fourth War Loan Drive*

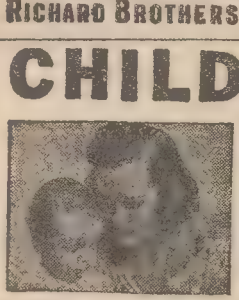
POEMS WANTED

For Musical Setting

Mother, Home, Love, Sacred, Patriotic, Comic or any subject. DON'T DELAY—Send us your Original Poem at once—for immediate examination and FREE RHYMING DICTIONARY.

RICHARD BROTHERS 53 WOODS BUILDING CHICAGO, ILL.

CHILDLESS



Wives WHO WISH BABIES!

Doctor's Information SENT FREE!

Concerning simple way followed at home by which the female organs in relievable functional sterility may be assisted so that motherhood may then so often be easily possible! YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND MAY LATER THANK THE DAY YOU SENT FOR THIS FREE INFORMATION. Women from over the Nation write us of their joy in becoming mothers at last! FOR FREE COPY write to Warner Co., 417 W. Lake St., Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma so terrible you choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is impossible because of the struggle to breathe, if you feel the disease is slowly wearing your life away, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered a lifetime and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO., 317-M Frontier Bldg.
462 Niagara St., Buffalo, N. Y.

YES, YOU WILL HAVE

LOVELY CURVES

Don't let your life be spoiled by shame or embarrassment over a flat, undeveloped or sagging bust! Successful experience of thousands of women proves you can help develop glamorous contours and an alluring bustline of high, youthful rounded fullness. All you do is follow the tested, proven, easy-to-use methods given in the wonderful, scientifically authentic book, "Approved Methods for Care and Development of the Bust." Experience the thrilling joys of having your bust appear shapely, rounded, beautiful. Bring out the romantic curves which rouse envy, admiration and approval. Lifetime results, safely, easily and positively. If not satisfied, return within 10 days and money will be refunded.

SEND NO MONEY!

Take advantage of this extraordinary reduction. Formerly more than Double this price. Now only $1.00. Order now C.O.D. plus postage. Pay Postman on arrival. To save Postage Send $1.00 with order, and we ship Prepaid in plain wrapper.

Now Only **$1.00**

Never before so greatly reduced

SUCCESS STUDIOS
Baltimore, Md. Box 895-E

HONEYMOON CHARM DROPS

Bewitch, allure and captivate with this rare, stimulating fragrance. Just one drop of this secret aroma will endure for hours and will add a more thrilling, irresistible charm to you! ALSO FREE PERSONAL DIRECTIONS tell you HOW to use if you want to win love. SEND NO MONEY! Full size bottle sent in plain wrapper. Pay postman on delivery 98c plus postage, or send $1 and we pay postage. One bottle FREE if 2 ordered. Money Back Guarantee.

VELMO CO., Dept. AC-9, 152 West 42nd St., New York City

LODESTONE

May Bring You

MONEY • LOVE • POWER

Unlucky in games of chance, love, money, business? Legend says ancient occults carried two live Magnetic Lodestones as an alleged

POWERFUL LUCKY CHARM!

one to DRAW, COMPEL, ATTRACT luck to numbers in money, love, games, and work, the other believed to protect against evil, obstacles, and bad luck. No super-natural claims made. Sold as genuine extra highly magnetic genuine full strength lodestones or money back. Every pair GUARANTEED alive. Complete with all information, $1.29 pair postpaid or C.O.D. plus postage.

FREE with every order: Seal No. 14 (alleged Seal of Good Luck at Play and Games). Rush your order now.

LODIE CO., 37 East 19, Dept. 18-S, New York 3, N.Y.

The stagehand. The small, nervous, Irish grip.

"Make it two hundred," the grip said suddenly.

Haneken groaned with his own impotence. He waited. Tried again to raise his head. Very slowly, the muscles responded. Painfully. A galaxy of orange and blue speared at his eyes.

"Right," the grip said. "Yeah. Yes. Two hundred. Cash. I got it."

The telephone receiver banged down.

Slowly the feet turned, came back toward him. Haneken hadn't heard the other pick up the long, leaded paperweight on the secretary's desk, but, by lifting his eyes, he could see its dark bottom swinging against the other's legs.

It was a mad, crazy time of fear-filled numbness and the knowledge that pain and death were very near. He couldn't seem to collect himself. It was as though he were hanging over a cliff by the slimmest branch. He couldn't draw himself up, and he couldn't let go.

The grip stepped beside him, hesitated. Experimentally, Haneken tightened the muscles of his back. They ached and jumped and protested, but they moved. He wasn't altogether helpless. Something was left.

He could see the knees draw back a little, when the grip raised his hands. Whether it was enough or not, it would have to do.

In a rage of quivering tendons, he swung himself over onto his back—and the fat paperweight thudded downward, dented the carpet where his head had been a second before. Through white lips, he swore long and richly. Stretching his hands above his head, he hooked his fingers into the cloth of the grip's trousers, pulled downward with every bit of the strength in him.

It was the unexpectedness of the move. Not the force behind it. Screaming, the grip fell backward. Haneken cried a little with the pain of the up-

ended shoes in his side. But the sound of skull bone cracking against sharp panelling was a grand sound, Haneken knew, before he fainted, that the grip would lay quiet for a long time.

THE first thing he remembered was an announcer saying through the tiny radio, "And now—this is Cecil Firth, reminding you that this week is National Raisin Week. Get a box of Higgins' Vitaraisins for your kiddie today. They're Good For You!"

Haneken waited a moment to see whether or not he would become sick, then sat up very slowly. The grip was sprawled against the wall, his hands doubled under him as though he'd tried to catch himself when he fell. Beside him on the floor lay the paperweight and the red Latin-titled book. Wincing, Haneken reached for the book, raised it carefully in his hands. Obviously, if there was a key to the whole mess, that key lay somewhere in the white paper pages before him.

He let the book rest on his knees and opened it.

He read:

. . . *in Ancient Persia. During the reign of Darius IV, the belief that invisibility could be obtained by boiling a pure black cat* . . .

Puzzled, he turned further back.

. . . *factual basis. A man who walks beneath a ladder, for instance, runs the very natural risk of having a pail of paint fall upon his head* . . .

Slowly, Haneken closed the book, frowned at its bland red cover. What the hell was it all about? He shook his throbbing head. Someone had ordered the stagehand to kill him to get the book, but why? What on earth could possibly be of interest to him in it? He'd picked it up in connection with Archer's death, so Archer's death figured in it somewhere.

He blew his breath up over his face, worried his body into a sitting position. For a time he was forced to cling to the side of the wall, but soon the swinging in his head quieted. He

PAYS accumulated ACCIDENT BENEFITS for Accidental Loss of Life, Limb, or Sight up to $6000.00

For LOSS OF TIME! Accident Disability Benefits up to $100 a month for as long as 24 months, or $2400.00

SICKNESS BENEFITS For Loss of Time due to Sickness, a maximum Monthly Income of . . . . . $100.00 PER MO.

HOSPITAL EXPENSES for Sickness or Accident, including $5.00 a day for hospital room, up to $650.00

All Around PROTECTION! . . . Accidents happen to 20 persons every minute of every day, and sickness strikes when least expected. So why take chances? NOW you can have all-around insurance protection, backed by an old-line LEGAL RESERVE Company for less than $1 a month. Policy pays for ALL accidents, ALL the common sicknesses, even for minor injuries, and disability benefits start from very first day.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION required! No red tape! Policy issued BY MAIL at BIG SAVINGS. Ages 15 to 69. Actual Policy sent for 10 Days' FREE Examination. ACT NOW! Write for it today. No cost. No obligation. No salesman will call.

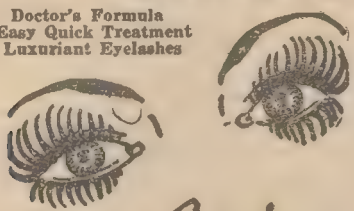
FREE 10-Day Inspection Coupon

THE SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
440A Service Life Bldg. Omaha, Nebr.
Without cost or obligation, send your GOLD SEAL $1-A-MONTH Policy for 10 DAYS' FREE INSPECTION.

Name _____
Address _____ Age _____
City _____ State _____
Beneficiary _____

YOU CAN NOW HAVE STUNNING EYELASHES

A Doctor's Formula
For Easy Quick Treatment
For Luxuriant Eyelashes



Longer Eyelashes
MAKE YOU MORE ATTRACTIVE

Nothing gives you such a feeling of glamour as long, silky lashes and bright sparkling eyes. Longer eyelashes spotlight your eyes. Make them more appealing by the new easy LASHGRO method. All you do is rub LASHGRO gently along the edges of the lids with the brush that comes with your kit. Do this until the lashes reach the desired luxuriance. FREE instructions and treatise on eye beauty care with each order. 10 months' supply, only $2.00 complete including Federal tax and postage, or $2.35 C.O.D. (Sorry, no samples.) If not delighted, your money back. (No C.O.D. outside of U. S.).

AVALON LANE CO., Dept. AF-4, 175 E. Broadway, New York 2, N. Y.

DIAMOND RINGS

AT LAST—you may own a beautiful genuine DIAMOND and solid yellow GOLD "Matched Bridal Pair" of rings at a SPECIAL low price. We offer a 10-day trial—complete satisfaction or your MONEY BACK. For a limited time only—$5.95 each or the "Bridal Pair" ONLY $9.95 plus Federal tax. SEND NO MONEY—when your rings arrive pay postman plus few cents postal charges. ACT NOW—genuine sparkling DIAMONDS, solid GOLD rings. Gift box FREE. A stunning "Matched Bridal Pair" that must please you or may be returned for refund. Will last a lifetime.

VICTORY DIAMOND CO., Dept. 55 St. Clairsville, Ohio

Magic Liquid Makes
PHOTOS APPEAR

On Scarfs, Ties, Stationery, Etc.

Reproduce any snapshot on *cloth, leather, wood, paper.* Simply apply liquid. Like magic photo appears within 2 minutes in broad daylight. Harmless to negative. Won't wash off. Full colors included. Complete kit for 100 photos only $1.29. Send no money, just name. Pay postman $1.29 plus few cents postage on delivery. (Canada, $1.50 money order only.) Order today.

L & M Mfg. Co. Dept. 304, Neave Bldg. Cincinnati 2, Ohio

The BIBLE Omits

Read how the Author traces the steps of the MASTER, as one would seeking missing persons, in his desire to fathom a void about which there is scarcely a word in the new testament to indicate His whereabouts,

YOU MUST READ THIS REVEALING BOOK

How for 18 years . . . from the age of 12 when He confounded the doctors. When He was missing for three days. Following along into His manhood. These "ABSENT YEARS" spent in preparation for His divine revelation. The Book tells of the greatest of all grand careers. The 18 Absent Years of JESUS CHRIST. Pay Postman $1.00 plus postage. Or send $1.00 with order. You get FREE a talisman on genuine Parchment of Christ at the age of 12. Send today. Read these 18 years mystery.

STANDARD O & B SUPPLY CO., • Dept. A-504
1930 Irving Park Road, Chicago 13, Illinois

moved carefully across the room to the secretary's desk.

When he'd picked up the phone and dialed operator, he said, "Look, Honey, can you tell me who has extension 8321 on the lot?"

"That would be one of the stages. 83 is the stage extension. 21 would be the number. Stage 21."

Haneken said, "Thanks," and hung up.

Stage 21. No help there. On 21 George Grenville was making *The Colonel and the Lady.*

He called police and told them that a man had been hurt in Vernet's office, then he wandered carefully out of the room. He was headed toward the great grayness of the sound stages almost before he knew where he was going.

STAGE 21 was empty, cavernous and gray as a toothless whale's mouth. The Colonel company had folded, of course, until another lead could be obtained.

But someone had answered the phone when the Irish grip had called.

Haneken's feet made loud snapping noises as he moved aimlessly around, hunting for a wraith.

He found it inside the three-walled military set.

It was standing beside the camera and it said, "Hold it, Dee," very softly.

Haneken whispered, "George."

"Put down the book."

He let it fall at his feet. "George," he said. "For Heaven's sake, I don't get this at all."

"No. You wouldn't. Kick the book toward me."

Haneken shoved the book with one foot, and watched Grenville lean down, pick it up. The .38 in his right hand wavered for a moment, then rose again. Any chance Haneken may have had was gone.

"Now," Grenville said. "Suppose we start at the beginning. There are one or two things I'm not quite sure of."

Haneken felt the sickness coming back into his head. "You're lucky," he

said, "only one or two. I'm darned if I see any of it."

"You were wasted in publicity," Grenville said. "You should have been an actor." He opened the book in his hands, read silently.

When Haneken finally understood, he wasn't certain what the emotion was. Not horror, exactly, and not relief, but a strange uncomfortable blending of the two.

"George," he said, "you think—then it wasn't you on the phone."

"What phone?" Grenville glanced up suspiciously.

"This phone. On the stage."

"What the devil are you gibbering about?"

"When did you get here?"

"When you did. I followed you in. What are you trying to pull now? I know you killed Archer. You hated him."

"Then in the Research room . . ."

"I had a hunch the number I heard you telling about was the call number of a library book. I wanted to get to it before you did. I knew the darned thing had something to do with Archer's death, but I wasn't sure what it was."

Slowly, like the mixed-up titles in a film that start from chaos and finally rearrange themselves into a sensible whole, the incredibly rotten mess was becoming clear to Haneken. Black cats. Ladders. The slow, clean turning of a bomber in the sky and the splash of sunlight on one white star.

"George," he said suddenly. "The book is on superstitions. Look up the part on Army superstitions. Flying corps. This war."

"What?"

"Look it up!"

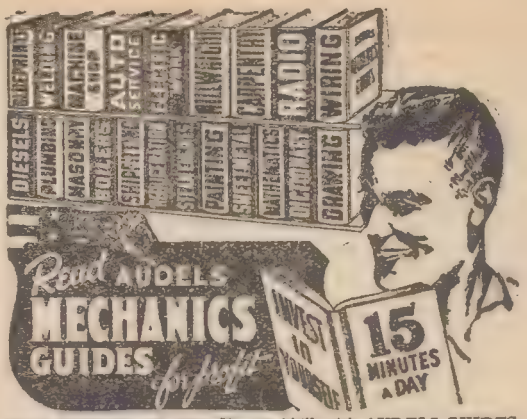
Startled, Grenville turned to the index, found the page he wanted. He read, "It is a well-known fact among Army men that members of the Tank Corps will not enter their tanks—"

"Flying corps. Forget the tanks."

Grenville turned the page.

Haneken waited, sweating.

"Let us take up the 'three-on-a-



Every Mechanic can Step Up his Skill with AUDELS GUIDES. Containing Practical Inside Information in a Handy Form. Covers facts and figures of your Trade. All illustrated and explained. Books sent to you for 7 Days Free Examination. Send No Money—Nothing to Pay Postman. Check and Mail Coupon Today.

MAIL ORDER

AUDEL, *Publishers*, 49 W. 23 St., New York 10, N.Y.
Mail for 7 days free trial books marked (X). I agree to mail $1 in 7 days on each book ordered and $1 a month until purchase price is paid. If I am not satisfied with guides, I will return them.

☐ WELDERS	$1.	☐ AUTOMOBILE	$4.	☐ SHIPFITTER	$1.
☐ BLUEPRINT	2.	☐ RADIO	4.	☐ MATHEMATICS	2.
☐ MACHINIST	4.	☐ PLUMBERS	6.	☐ CARPENTERS	6.
☐ ELECTRICITY	4.	☐ SHEET METAL	1.	☐ DIESEL	2.

☐ ----------

Name ----------

Address ----------

Employed by ---------- Grant

BE A DETECTIVE

Make Secret Investigations

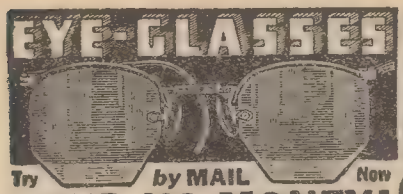
Earn Big money. Work home or travel. Fascinating work. Experience Unnecessary. DETECTIVE Particulars FREE. Write to GEO. T. N. WAGNER, 125 W. 86th St., N. Y.

★SONG POEMS WANTED
TO BE SET TO MUSIC

★Publishers need new songs. Submit one or more of your best ★poems for immediate consideration. Any subject. Send poem.
PHONOGRAPH RECORDS MADE
★FIVE STAR MUSIC MASTERS, 650 Beacon Bldg., Boston, Mass.

PILES

Let us tell you of a mild, painless, low cost home treatment perfected by Dr. O. A. Johnson, for 28 years head physician of one of America's Finest Rectal Clinics where thousands of cases have been successfully treated. Write today for Free Trial Offer. No obligation. Address JOHNSON RECTAL CLINIC, Desk 982 Kansas City, Mo.



"Facts about EPILEPSY"

This most interesting and helpful Booklet will be mailed to anyone while the supply lasts. I will send a free copy to anyone who writes for it. C. M. SIMPSON, Address Dept. A22, 1840 W. 44th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

DICE • CARDS

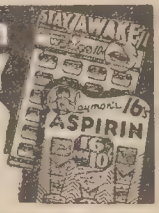
Perfect Dice, Magic Dice, Magic Cards—*READ THE BACKS*—Inks, Daubs, Poker Chips, Gaming Layouts, Dice Boxes, Counter Games, Punchboards. WRITE FOR CATALOG TODAY.

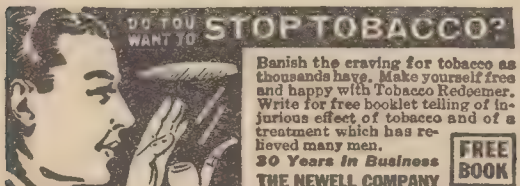
K. C. CARD CO., 1242 W. Washington Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

Store Route Plan PAYS BIG MONEY

SELL COUNTER CARD PRODUCTS

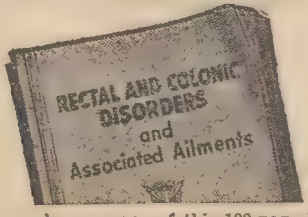
Build a good-paying business of your own. Call on dealers of all kinds; show nationally-advertised Aspirin, Vitamins, Cosmetics and 200 other necessities. Big 5c and 10c retail packages, high quality. Attractive counter displays sell goods fast. Free book gives amazing facts. Write! World's Products Co., Dept. 29-S, Spencer, Ind.





GOOD NEWS

For Piles - Colon Sufferers



You may now have a copy of this 122-page FREE BOOK by asking for it with a postcard or letter. No obligation so write today. The McCleary Clinic, 444 Elms Blvd., Excelsior Springs, Mo.

match' theory, so popular during the first World War. The belief that three on a match was unlucky sprang from the fact that a match, kept lighted for so long a time, revealed soldiers' positions. In the present conflict, however, the usual procedure is directly reversed, especially among members of the flying corps. It is almost a ritual with flyers to go 'three-on-a-match' before undertaking a flight, because of the standard number of planes in a fighting group, i.e., three . . ."

The little, lonely sound of applause stopped Grenville.

Haneken said, "Join us, Major," in a small voice.

WHILE Grenville stared, Major Robert Petersen stepped from behind one of the set walls, a tiny, deadly .22 revolver steady in his hands, and walked slowly to the camera.

"Extremely interesting reading, Grenville," he said. "I'll take the book if you don't mind."

Grenville said, "Sure," helplessly, and handed the book to him.

"And the gun."

It clattered on the concrete floor.

"Thank you."

"Technical advisor," Haneken whispered.

Petersen turned toward him, ducking his head with dignity under the camera boom. "You said something?"

"I thought I'd seen you somewhere. On a government list of deserters, wasn't it?"

"Your mind is razor sharp this afternoon, Haneken. I shall have to send your name to a radio quiz."

"What got you into this business, Petersen? The money offered? Technical advisors are well paid out here, they tell me."

"The money. Yes. But then the glamour . . ." Petersen smiled.

"And Archer suspected you when you made one of your superstitious mistakes?"

"A very discerning man, our Mr. Archer. Different from the usual run

of sheep out here. I rather think he looked up my flowery references too. And my references were my weak point. It was no trouble getting in, believe me. A contact here, a contact there. The right drink in the right bar with the right man.

"Once I was inside, I met so many old friends to bear me out. Mr. Doolan, for example, who looks the same as a grip as he did when he figured in the Hickman murder. Perhaps you remember it. Doolan did. He was a great help." Petersen paused suddenly. "Incidentally, where is—"

Grenville moved his aching arms. "Petersen—"

"Yes, my little friend. You were about to say 'what now?' " The other grinned at him. "I'm terribly sorry, gentlemen. But when I leave, I really can't have people left who know my secret so well, can I?"

He paused. "By the way, Haneken," he said curiously, "what slip did I make to get you into such a suspecting frame of mind?"

"The stars you wanted to paint on a plane's wings. I saw an Army bomber this noon—with one star on its right under-wing. Not on both. It was stupid, Petersen. Someone was bound to remember sooner or later that anti-aircraft guns wouldn't be given a chance to center between two stars. One is painted under the right wing; one is fixed *over* the left."

"Ah," Petersen murmured. "Thank you." He drew a deep breath. "And now . . ."

He raised the gun. Haneken waited for the bullet shock to end the swift prayer he was giving. It was a long wait.

Because Grenville, in a moment of sheer cunning and genius, had managed to rest his hands on the steel wheel that controlled the vertical motion of the camera boom, and camera booms must be able to raise and lower very quickly.

This one lowered as though it had been kicked in the groin.

It caught Petersen split inches

Double Duty LIFE INSURANCE

POLICY PAYS MAXIMUM BENEFITS

LOOK AHEAD! $2000.00

Policy Costs Only $1.00 a Month

Foresight prevents heartbreaks — prepare NOW! Provide for those you love this wise, easy way. Only a few pennies a day will pay for DOUBLE DUTY LIFE INSURANCE backed by Legal Reserves. Old reliable Pioneer Life Insurance Company offers this assured protection without restrictions as to Occupation, Travel or Residence and includes valuable Incontestability Clause — all as plainly stated in the policy. Men, women and children from 10 years to 65 years of age eligible. No Red Tape—No Medical Examination! Full details sent by mail. No Agent will call. Write at once for FREE inspection offer. DON'T DELAY!

5-POINT PROTECTION
Pays for
LOSS of LIFE
due to
1-Natural Causes . . .
2-All Sicknesses . . .
3-Ordinary Accidents
4-Travel Accidents . .
5-Old Age Disability Benefit Included . .

PIONEER LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
5082 Pioneer Building • Rockford, Illinois

(SIDELINE Salesmen and Agents)

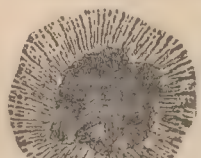
Sell our Illustrated Comic Booklets, and other novelties. Each booklet size 4¼ by 3¼. Ten different sample booklets sent for 50c or 25 assorted for $1.00. Shipped prepaid. Wholesale novelty price list sent with order only. No C.O.D. orders. Send cash or stamps. Print name and address.
REPSAC SALES CO., 1 West 13 St., Dept. 404, New York

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.
American School, Dpt. H475, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

ASTHMA MUCUS LOOSENED ATTACKS RELIEVED
AT ONCE BY KINSMAN'S ASTHMA INHALANT.
WRITE TODAY for absolutely FREE TRIAL supply.
CAPITAL DRUG CO., Dept. AAF-7, AUGUSTA, MAINE

10 DRESSES, cleaned, pressed, $2.98
FREE Catalog, 200 Used, New Clothing.
Bargains for Entire Family.
COMPLETE STOCK OF ARMY GOODS
FARMERS' MAIL ORDER HOUSE
628 Broadway Dept. SH New York, N. Y.



BELIEVE IN LUCK?-$

Carry a pair of GENUINE BRAHMA RED LIVE HIGHLY MAGNETIC LODESTONES! Legend reputes, Occult Oriental ancients superstitiously carried two Live Lodestones as MOST POWERFUL MAGNETIC "LUCKY" CHARMS, one to "attract" Good Luck in Money, Games, Love, Business, Work, etc., the other to "prevent" Bad Luck, Losses, Evil, Trouble, Harm, etc. Believe in Luck? Carry a Pair of these curious Genuine Brahma Red Live Lodestones! We make no supernatural claims. $1.97 Postpaid for the two, with all information. $1.97 and 15c extra if C.O.D. Satisfaction GUARANTEED or Money Returned. Order yours NOW!

ASTROL CO., Dept. 14, Main P. O.
Box 72, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

NOTICE! Beware of imitations! We absolutely GUARANTEE these Genuine Brahma Lodestones are ALIVE! We believe they are just what you want, the REAL THING—POWERFUL DRAWING, EXTRA HIGHLY MAGNETIC! Fully Guaranteed—Order TODAY!
Copyright, 1941—A. Co.

Get into RADIO ELECTRONICS TELEVISION now!

SHOP METHOD HOME TRAINING

Command good jobs as Radio Technician in Uncle Sam's forces or in civilian industries. National's actual shop practice methods qualify you. Investigate!

Your opportunity is here. Radio technicians needed everywhere—afield in action and at home in industry. Get into Radionics now which embraces Radio, Electronics and Television. National Schools offers tested home training method—an actual entension of training you would receive if attending school in person.

2 BOOKS FREE

FREE LESSON AND OPPORTUNITY BOOK

MAIL COUPON FOR FREE LESSON & BOOK

National Schools, Dept. 4-AFR
4000 So. Figueroa, Los Angeles 37, Calif.

(Mail in envelope or paste on penny postal)

Mail me FREE, without obligation, one Lesson and Opportunity Book, with full details about how I CAN become a RADIO Technician.

NAME ..... AGE.....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE.....

PSORIASIS SUFFERERS

ENJOY A CLEAR SKIN—IT IS POSSIBLE!!

"En-Ex," a liquid applied externally, CLEARS SKIN OR MONEY BACK WITHIN 2 WEEKS

NO STAIN NOT GREASY

$1.00 REG. SIZE BOTTLE

Hundreds of Satisfied Users. Send currency, M.O. or sent C.O.D. Write today

EN-EX COMPANY

634 Society for Savings Bldg., Cleveland, O.

Lovely DRESSES 10 for $3.98

ORIGINAL VALUES UP TO $14.00

Slightly used. Dry cleaned and pressed. Assorted styles. Sizes 12 to 20—10 for $3.98. Sizes 38 to 46—5 for $3.00. Assorted colors. State sizes desired. Send 50c with order, balance C.O.D. plus postage. MERCHANDISE GUARANTEED or purchase price refunded. Beat the price rise—order now! Hundreds of other unusual bargains in new and used clothing for entire family. FREE ILLUSTRATED CATALOG.

IDEAL MAIL ORDER CO., Dept. DW

289 Thatford Ave. Brooklyn 12, N. Y.

WORLD'S LARGEST DENTAL PLATE MAKERS Now by Mail

FALSE TEETH

On 60 Days' Trial!

from Our Laboratory Direct to You! Dental Plates made to measure—individually—by MAIL. Take own impression at home. Over 100,000 men & women wear teeth we made

$9.95 to $35 Model Photo

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE!

SEND NO MONEY!

FREE Impression Material, Information, Catalog, Low Prices.

UNITED STATES DENTAL CO.

3855 MILWAUKEE AVE., DEPT. 4-92 CHICAGO, ILL.

above his left ear, and sank with the dull sound of a sharp edge in soft bone. Although it wasn't enough to knock him unconscious, it was more than enough to keep him occupied.

Breathless with shock, Petersen turned, one hand going involuntarily to his head, the other convulsive on the trigger of his gun.

And while a wasp of a bullet snapped at Grenville and sang ricocheting off a far wall, Haneken dove at him. It was a fine dive. It caught Petersen above the knees and forced him to the floor. Haneken's hands were having a devil of a time finding enough man to hit.

Sometimes they pounded into the concrete floor, but more often they glanced off jawbone or stomach first. Petersen was squirming and swearing beneath him like some obscene little bug.

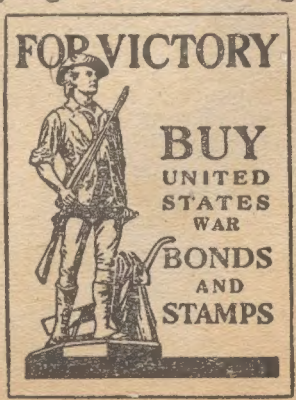
For centuries Haneken fought, while the whine in his ears grew and grew, and the beautiful lights behind his eyes flashed like something out of Grimm.

He fought longer than he had to. It was minutes before Grenville could pry him from the motionless, unresisting form he was straddling.

Part of the world around him must have been dreamed, but part was surely true. The hospital bed now. That was real.

But the voice of the producer's secretary, Jean something-or-other?

It seemed to be saying, "Of course he'll be well soon. We have a date. We're going to the beach together."



The Most Daring Offer Ever Made!

Richly Grained GOLD STAMPED Simulated Leather
HOLLYWOOD DOUBLE PHOTO FRAME and Pocket-size MATCHING MINIATURE

Both For Only $1.98

Backed by this DARING GUARANTEE

If you are not satisfied that this is the biggest Frame Value in America, return ONLY the large double photo frame for a complete refund of the $1.98 purchase price, and KEEP the lovely pocket frame as a FREE GIFT from us for your trouble.

Imagine! This Miniature Frame FREE!
Yes, Absolutely Free even if you do not spend a penny!

Preserves The Pictures Of Those You Love

Here is your chance to own two truly exquisite photo frames of rare quality and beauty at an almost unbelievable low price. Yes, when you see how really fine they are—so beautifully grained; so softly padded, so richly engraved in radiant gold—you'll marvel at how so much value can be yours for less than $5. That's when you'll realize why we can dare to guarantee satisfaction or give you one frame absolutely FREE PLUS your money back! Because war conditions limit the amount of quality materials and crystal-clear acetate, our supply of these frames is limited. So order yours today before the sell-out.

Choice of Colors—★ Brown ★ Navy ★ Wine ★ Ivory

LARGE, DOUBLE PHOTO FRAME in two sizes — for 8x10 Photos — for 5x7 Photos ★ **MATCHING MINIATURE FRAME** for pocket, purse or desk — holds 2¼ x 3¼ Photos

Also FREE IF YOU ACT NOW

好彩

SSJ

Chinese 'Good Luck' Emblem and Your Initials Stamped in 23-KT. GOLD

Yes, if you send your order in at once we will engrave your initials and a Chinese "Good Luck" Emblem in 23-Kt. gold on pocket frame absolutely free.

Rush This Coupon For This Truly Sensational Bargain!

GIFT CRAFT—Dept. AF44
666 Lake Shore Drive—Chicago 11, Illinois

Enclosed find $1.98 for payment in full for Two Hollywood Double Photo Frames (1 Large Library Size and 1 Pocket-Size Miniature) with the understanding that if I do not find them to be a truly outstanding value I need only return the Library size frame and get a complete refund of my $1.98. Please engrave the pocket frame in 23-kt. gold with my initials and Chinese good luck emblem.

Check size of library frame wanted ☐ for 8x10 photos ☐ for 5x7 photos
Check color choice here ☐ Brown ☐ Navy ☐ Wine ☐ Ivory

My Full Name_____
Please Print Clearly
Address_____

City_____ State_____

WE PREPAY POSTAGE ON ALL CASH-IN-FULL ORDERS.
If C.O.D. check here ☐ I will pay postman $1.98 plus postage.

Now YOU Can Lick Any AUTO REPAIR JOB!

IN LESS TIME—WITH LESS WORK

FREE 7-DAY OFFER

USED BY U. S. ARMY

MoToR's New AUTO REPAIR MANUAL shows you how to service and repair ANY part of ANY car!

No auto repair job is too tough when you've got MoToR's AUTO REPAIR MANUAL! YOU can repair anything from carburetor to rear end—quickly, easily, right! Just look up make, model, and the job in the quick index—and go to work! Clear, illustrated instructions lead you step by step.

To make such an amazing book possible, the engineer-editors of MoToR Magazine collected and "broke down" 150 official factory *shop manuals* for you, spotted all the vital repair information you need, dove-tailed it all together into ONE handy, easy-to-understand book.

No Other Manual Like It!

This BIG book—640 pages, 8½x11 inches, bound in sturdy covers—brings you nearly 200,000 service, repair, adjustment, replacement, tune-up facts on every car built from 1935 to 1942. More than 1000 cut-away photos, diagrams, drawings show you exactly WHAT to do and HOW to do it! Used by the U. S. Army, trade and technical schools everywhere, thousands of auto servicemen.

Now YOU—*without cost*—can see for yourself what a wonderbook MoToR's Auto Repair Manual really is. TRY it—FREE for 7 days! Learn first-hand how it can *pay for itself* the first few times you use it.

SEND NO MONEY

7-Day Free Examination

Just mail coupon below—*without money!* When the postman brings your book, pay him nothing. First make it *show* you what it's got! Unless you agree this is the greatest time-saver and work-saver you've ever seen—return book in 7 days and pay nothing. Mail coupon today! Address: MoToR Book Department, Desk 35-D, 572 Madison Ave., New York 22, New York.

Clear, Pictured Facts on Every Job on Every Car Built Since 1935!

Nearly 200,000 service and repair facts on all these makes:

American Bantam	Ford	Oldsmobile
Auburn	Graham	Overland
Austin	Hudson	Packard
Buick	Hupmobile	Pierce Arrow
Cadillac	Lafayette	Plymouth
Chevrolet	La Salle	Pontiac
Chrysler	Lincoln	Reo
Cord	Lincoln Zephyr	Studebaker
De Soto	Mercury	Terraplane
Dodge	Nash	Willys

640 big pages; including 50 pages of carburetor text, charts, illustrations, covering all models. Over 450 charts, tables; Tune-up Chart; Valve Measurements; Compression Pressure; Torque Wrench Reading; Starting Motor; Engine Clearances; Generator; Clutch & Brake Specifications; Front End Measurements, etc., Engines; Electric, Fuel, Cooling, Lubricating Systems; Transmissions; Universals; Front Ends; Wheels; Rear Ends, etc.

Same FREE 7-Day Offer Applies on New MoToR's TRUCK REPAIR MANUAL

For mechanics, truck specialists, service stations, fleet owners. Covers EVERY job on EVERY truck made since 1936! 1400 pictures, 900 pages, 300,000 facts. Used by Armed Forces. Warranted to contain every essential fact you need to know. Sturdy binding, size 8½ x 11.

Covers all types Gasoline Engines: Diesels and Hesselmans. **Fuel Systems, Governors, Lubrication Systems, Ignition Systems, Starters, Generators, Clutches, Transmissions, Axles, Torque Dividers, Transfer Cases, Brakes, Steering,** etc., etc.

Offered on same FREE 7-Day examination as Auto Repair Manual. Check box in coupon at right.

MoToR **Published by MoToR, The Leading Automotive Business Magazine.** MoToR's manuals assure high standards of repair work.

MAIL COUPON NOW FOR 7-DAY FREE TRIAL

MoToR Book Dept., Desk 35-D, 572 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.
Rush to me at once: (Check box opposite book you want).

☐ **MoToR's AUTO REPAIR MANUAL.** *(formerly "MoToR's Factory Shop Manual").* If O.K. I will remit $1 in 7 days, and $1 monthly for 4 months, plus 35c delivery charge with final payment ($5.35 in all). Otherwise I will return book postpaid in 7 days. **(Foreign price, remit $7 cash with order).**

☐ **MoToR's TRUCK REPAIR MANUAL.** (Described at left in the box.) If O.K., I will remit $2 in 7 days, and $2 monthly for 3 months, plus 35c delivery charges with final payment ($8.35 in all). Otherwise I will return book postpaid in 7 days. **(Foreign price, remit $11 cash with order).**

Name_____ Age_____

Address_____

City_____ P.O. Unit No. (if any)_____ State_____

Occupation_____

☐ **SAVE 35c!** Check here if enclosing full payment (check, money-order) WITH coupon. We pay 35c shipping costs.

10 OF OUR TEN DETECTIVE ACES 10 STORIES 10¢

SCAN COURTSEY OF
EXCITER